



Library podcast

Nicholas Reynolds and Feliks Banel discuss *Writer, Sailor, Soldier, Spy*

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[00:00:37] Now it is my pleasure to introduce Nicholas Reynolds and Feliks Banel. Nicholas Reynolds has worked in the field of modern military history and intelligence off and on for 40 years. He served as an infantry officer and then a historian in the United States Marine Corps during the 1970s before becoming a colonel in the reserves. When not on duty with the Marine Corps he served as a CIA officer at home and abroad. Most recently he was the historian for the CIA museum responsible for developing its strategic plan and helping to turn remarkable artifacts into compelling stories. He currently teaches as an adjunct professor for Johns Hopkins University. Our interview tonight is Feliks banal. Feliks is an Emmy nominated producer whose work has appeared on the Seattle channel KCET s 9 and Cairo Radio among others banal is also the host of The History series. This not just in for KUOW Feliks was deputy director of the sea at Seattle's Museum of History and Industry from 1999 to 2006 and is project director of a Moai initiative to document the history of cable TV and that industry in the Pacific Northwest. They're here today to discuss writer Sailor Soldier Spy Ernest Hemingway secret adventures 1935. To 1961 a literary biography with the soul of an espionage thriller. Reynolds new book explores the connection between Hemingway's service as a spy and his writing from that period. And interestingly there's even a local connection to Emma Watson. Let's learn more. Please help me welcome Nicholas Reynolds and Feliks banal. As

[00:02:19] Are we on. Oh yes that's powerful. Okay. Well thank you all for coming. I see some Seattle mountaineers and some acupuncturists from middle way acupuncture Institute. And I want to shout or give a shout out to both of those groups the Mountaineers is a group that got me here to this library because I came out last summer or last spring to do a mountaineering course I stayed nearby and I came over to this wonderful library and went upstairs and did a little bit of research and found some facts about Ernest Hemingway and Ernest Watson Emma Watson Ernest Watson Emma Watson that I had not been aware of before. So we're gonna start out by my telling you a little bit about the genesis of this book and then Feliks and I are gonna chat for a bit and then we're going to throw it out open for questions. So as you heard in the introduction I am a card carrying historian if you scratch my soul deep enough to scratch the surface deep enough what you find in my soul is is a research

historian. And in 2009 2010 I was working at the CIA library at this and the CIA museum. As the historian for that museum which means that I researched exhibits I came up with the content that you read on the wall in the museum. We designed a an exhibit that actually came here to Seattle and went to PAX PSI. And my job initially was to look. At o ss which was America's first central intelligence agency all lowercase

[00:04:07] And I did that by researching who was in Oasis. And I remembered that the Hemingway's had a connection or especially Ernest had a connection with Oasis. And I started to pull on that thread to see how far it would go. And I came up with some interesting results. And the one interesting result was that Ernest his brother and his son all found their way independently to o ss when you consider that Oasis had something like thirteen thousand people in at its peak and one hundred thirty million people in the United States at the time. That's kind of a remarkable coincidence that sort of crowdsourcing by the Hemingway family. And so I kept on pulling on Hemingway threads to see where they would lead. And I eventually stopped doing Hemingway research for the library and started doing Hemingway research for myself. And I came upon the fact

[00:05:09] In sometime in 2010 or 2011 that Hemingway had been had had a relationship with the NKVD which is the predecessor of the KGB it was the Soviet spy apparatus.

[00:05:23] And what I read was that sometime in 1940 late 1940 or early 1941 he had agreed to become a Soviet spy. He had been recruited by the NKVD.

[00:05:39] So I'm a lifelong Hemingway fan and I've got a kind of middle road slightly right of center or maybe national security orientation. And this didn't sit very well with me. In fact it it as I wrote in the introduction I felt like I had taken an elbow deep in the gut so I needed to come up.

[00:06:04] I went to look for there went to look for somebody to explain this to me. What does it mean that Ernest Hemingway signed up with the Soviets in 1940 and there's hundreds of Hemingway books out there. There's everybody this season alone there's five new books including mine and I figured somebody had taken this on and either explained it and explained it away or explained it. And there was no such person. So I wound up appointing myself. I didn't set out to write this book. The subject kind of found me and carried me away. So I I went on a I researched all up and down the East Coast reached out a little bit to some West Coast institutions like this one. There's the Stanford Institute Stanford there's the Hoover Institute at Stanford. There's some Spanish War collections in Spanish Civil War conduct collections down south in San Diego. And after two or three years of research I began to see how the recruitment by the NKVD fit into Hemingway's life and I began to see a coherent story and narrative arc that I thought went from 1935 until the end of his life. That's basically the story in the book. I tried to write creative nonfiction which means I'm trying to make it fun for the reader and a little more colorful than the things I was accustomed to writing which were just the facts please tell me exactly what happened. That's my training exactly what happened and I still wanted to be very very careful with my sourcing but I also want to make it fun to read. So anyway the books there and those of you who are so inclined I hope you'll read it and enjoy it. And meantime Feliks and I are going to talk for a bit and then open it out to questions from you.

[00:08:10] Thank you everybody. Nice to see you all tonight. Thanks Deborah for putting this together. It's a perfect Seattle evening. It's kind of cold outside it's raining the Mariners really suck this year it's the day after mayday that was pretty calm so it's a perfect literary Seattle evening. So first question I'd had to ask you what's the overdue book fine at the CIA library. The overdue book fine.

[00:08:30] Let's see. That's a secret.

[00:08:34] All right. All right. So now you were you. Were you much of a Hemingway. Were you a deeply Hemingway devotee before you got into this or what. How many of his books did you read or how about. I like my book.

[00:08:45] So before this all started before 2010 I think I had read virtually everything I could find by Hemingway with the exception of the letters. So you may know Hemingway was a terrific letter writer and he wrote almost as many if not more letters over his life than he wrote novels short stories and newspaper reporting. These books are being his letters are being published by the Hemingway society. They're not going to finish in my lifetime unless I live to be very very old.

[00:09:18] They're going to be 20 or 30 volumes of letters each one like through two or three hundred pages at least I know I read they get read Sun Also Rises and Farewell To Arms in high school and then there's the later books that begin with for whom the bell tolls. It seems like there was a pretty big shift. And you you describe in your book how the Spanish Civil War. How did that change. Ernest Hemingway How did it morph him from an author into this gentleman who's willing to become a spy essentially.

[00:09:45] Ok. Before the Spanish civil wars the Spanish Civil War runs from 1936 to early 1939. And it's it's a it's like for that generation it's maybe like the Vietnam War for my generation or World War 2 for my parents generation it's a it's a defining conflict. And Hemingway before the Spanish Civil War was a guy who didn't care that much about politics one way or another. He was maybe something of an anarchist maybe we would hear her on on on May Day.

[00:10:22] And so he starts with the book opens with a hurricane that's a kind of a conversion event for him. And and kind of kind of mobilizes his political sensibilities which are which boil down to sympathy for the underdog. And then he goes to Spain and he and the underdog in Spain is the antifascist side. Which is called the Republican side because it's defending the Spanish Republic and that's being challenged by the nationalists who are Franco and and Hemingway becomes an over-the-top antifascist who becomes this devotee of anything any way to fight fascism. And the the people the other people in Spain who are fighting fascism the other are the Soviets. The Soviets show up for that fight the Great Western democracies do not. And the bad guys do the Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy show up. So.

[00:11:23] Hemingway so that is awakened political consciousness marries up with this sympathy for the Soviets as willing anti fascists and I mean putting on both your historian and your intelligence hat

your government intelligence hat how are you able to draw those conclusions from how he's changing in that period.

[00:11:46] What is the evidence that you find or what's what did you did the thesis. Did you come up with the thesis and then seek out the evidence or did the evidence represent the thesis to you. I'm always curious how that.

[00:11:54] That's a great question. So you know chicken or the egg kind of question here. Initially I thought all I had was a journal article. I thought it would be an interesting journal article that would talk about. How much Ernest Hemingway was interested in the field of intelligence and how he dabbled in it between the time of the Spanish Civil War and the end of World War 2. And he did.

[00:12:21] I mean to a greater extent than a lot of Hemingway biographers and aficionados admit. So you know I wrote the journal article it got published. And then what I was struggling with so I didn't have a thesis. I knew I didn't have a thesis but I kept I kept researching it to satisfy my curiosity and what I was what I wanted to find was a good answer to the so what question. So it's kind of interesting that Hemingway did all this stuff but so what. Right. So so what what effect did it have on his life after that. Did he do anything significant for the Soviet. So is he like Kim Philby in the Cambridge Five Guys who delivered really high level British secrets to the Soviet Union.

[00:13:12] Is he like the Manhattan Project spies who delivered the U.S. atom bomb to the Soviets. No he's not like any of those. So that then then why bother. And the answer I came up with was it and even though he didn't make a great contribution as a spy it made a difference in his life. It made a difference in the choices that he made. After World War Two and affected what he wrote about. And it also contributed to the pressures that drove him to suicide in 1961.

[00:13:45] You know obviously our relationship now with it was going to be the Soviet Union but with Russia is fraught. And as you know Headline News front page news every single day the U.S. relationship with Russia or Soviet Union in the late 1930s was probably different. I mean could you. Is it easy to characterize. I mean was was what heavy we did to support the Soviet Union in 1940 or even 40s when he starts importing.

[00:14:09] Is that is that as bad as somebody doing something similar in 2016 let's say.

[00:14:16] I think so. The short answer is No. But it's complicated. It's a murky he's in a he's there's a couple of ways to answer this question. One is by looking at the relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union it's sort of the the 30000 foot level and. Until Roosevelt became president in 1933 the U.S. did not have diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. So he reestablished as Roosevelt reestablishes or establishes the U.S. never had diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. The U.S. establishes the relationships and the the the Soviets or the Russians I say I say they were all Russians whether they're Soviets as artists or or post-Soviet that. I think there's more continuities in Russian history than discontinuities anyway. They say Oh good. This is an opportunity to spy on the United States which is not which which would not be the reaction of the U.S. if the roles were

reversed where we're not a country that has been that interested in espionage and intelligence work up until recently. And so they they more or less flood the country with spies. And they want. There's a couple of things they want. They want American technology. They know they're behind. They want any advantage they can get which which will include stealing it and the Manhattan Project is the biggest example of that. But they also just don't understand.

[00:15:48] They don't. They know they don't. They know the US is going to be important and they just don't understand. And so they want people they want to recruit people in government who can tell them and they want to. So there's one category of Spy which is a classic. The guy the government official with access to the safe with the secrets and then and they're going to recruit people who are going to steal those secrets and give them to the Soviet case officer to take to Moscow. And then there's another category where Hemingway fits in that category as somebody who who's in between the. The classic spy and and sort of a support somebody who supports intelligence operations and they want people like Ernest to make introductions to explain things to them maybe to operate sort of as as go between. It's one thing to come from the Soviet consulate in your boxy suit you know and you're in your broken English and and go meet an American official why not have somebody like Ernest Hemingway do it for you you're an American journalist who can who can go and talk to an American official get the information and then give it to the Soviet. So and the last thing they want is influence. And somebody like Ernest Hemingway can shape the story that is put out there.

[00:17:10] So what does this have any connection this is another way of answering the So What question does this have any connection to what goes on today. And you know there's a couple. I did. I didn't start this book to write lessons that would apply that Trump era. But there are a couple that do. And one is that the Russians whether Soviet or not have been at this for a very long time. They're used to running operations in America and they're there no you know there's nobody there's there's no ACLU in the Soviet or the in Russia now that's saying Hey wait a minute you know we don't want to use our tax dollars to try and influence the American election. This is kind of business as usual for them.

[00:17:55] And and there has traditionally been a degree of American naivety I think since 1933 about the Russians. We basically give them carte blanche from 1933 to sometime in maybe 1945 when the FBI goes Oh my God who are all these people. So you know we're we're they're playing one game we're playing another and or we're not playing at all. Maybe more at play and we kind of. So we need to wake up to. We need to at least understand what they're doing and I think people like General Flynn the national security adviser who who is now enmeshed in these kind of discussions. So one of the things that comes up is the Foreign Agents Registration Act where you know General Flynn operating on behalf of the United States or some Soviet sorry some Russian client. And that's the sort of thing. So Ernest Hemingway might have been guilty of violating that act. Of being a representative of the Soviet Union. So you know there are there are lessons in in this story for today apart from just being I think a really interesting story about Ernest Hemingway.

[00:19:25] Yeah you know in the current era people like General Flynn or is it Carter Page who is the Trump campaign official who traveled to Russia that is named Carter Page.

[00:19:32] What do you want Manafort. MANAFORT when he was the campaign manager.

[00:19:36] Well yeah. This over the Ukraine.

[00:19:38] Carter Page was a Trump staff member I went and did a speech in Moscow but I'm just curious it seems like I guess as a writer myself having read much fiction but as a writer myself it sort of seems exciting that there was an era not that long ago where for evil foreign powers wanted to grab a hold of our novelists and use them to get as a means to an end and it seems like that's really change it seems like in the 1930s. Hemingway was at work Falconer was at work you know long list of American novelists who were writing novels for the canon and they were published and they were classics right away almost. It seems like we've lost that kind of there isn't the public square where the novelists are being picked off by the commies to do their bidding is that I mean is what's what's changed about culture and politics.

[00:20:20] Well I think that's a great question and one that I've not gotten to date.

[00:20:28] The the the for whom the bell tolls was one of the great novels of the 20th century and maybe one of the great political novels of all time and it was something that people bought and read and it was a bestseller almost immediately when it came out and it had an influence on people's views of what was going on in Europe.

[00:20:49] And if you're if you know if you if you compare that and then the Soviet interest in him the Soviets actually bought a copy of the book and sent it back to Moscow to include it in his file. You compare that to the sort to what General Flynn and General Flynn is not a literary figure it's kind of it's kind of a more. It's it's a more everyday kind of influence. This is his case is about influence peddling whether I'm not saying he's guilty I'm saying that's the inquiry did he you know who was he really working for is the question.

[00:21:26] The Hemingway question is is is much more complicated and and something that you could write a page thesis about sort of the the you know the the great political novel and espionage the Pasternak novel was the Doctor Zhivago was another one that had I think that's the last one I can think of were where anybody's looking at a great a great piece of work and and thinking of what influence it has on the on the body politic.

[00:21:57] My favorite part of the book where the chapters where you talked about Hemingway's life in Cuba in the 1940s and 1950s and you know this thing he ran with American support called The Crook Factory. What was that.

[00:22:07] What was The Crook Factory so after. So I mean Hemingway gets recruited by the Soviets in late 1940 early 1941 and and and then he starts basically he doesn't start work for them and he never really gets to work for them but he does other things for the U.S. government and maybe it's a reaction or maybe it's just circumstance. But he does a series of things for the U.S. government

during World War 2 and refers to himself as a secret agent of my government and one of those is the Crook Factory And The Crook Factory was a counterintelligence operation sanctioned actually run by supported by financed by the American embassy in Havana. And the idea was to try and suss out how many fascist sympathizers there were in Cuba and the way Hemingway went about this was to recruit people who circulated in the bars and bordellos and dockyards of of Havana and try to figure out if any of them were making pro Hitler or Mussolini statements or Franco for that matter it was not enormously successful but it was that that activity was not enormously successful but it was colorful.

[00:23:29] I mean his relationship with Cuba is famous it's in all his biographies of course. It seems like the political aspect of his admiration for Castro was he was Hemingway sort of fooled by Castro or dazzled by Castro or did he read more into Castro's aims or values that weren't really there. Was he looking for more than was really there with Castro.

[00:23:50] I would go. I think I'd go with dazzled and and I.

[00:23:55] He's looking at Castro through the eyes of someone who's been to the Spanish Civil War the Spanish Civil War is the pivotal event in his life and there's this whole this whole story kind of hinges on the Spanish Civil War. It's like it's like what kind of upbringing did a child have. So this was his political upbringing he was during the Spanish Civil War of course the the side that Hemingway supported loses the Spanish Civil War. And so the rest of his life he's kind of looking over his shoulder with a little bit of longing going sort of looking for that redemption. And then Castro comes along and here's a here's a bearded revolutionary. All right we're all in favor of beards and bearded revolutionary who is in the hills fighting the the right wing generals with with all our uniforms and strutting and repression know their identity with with big money and and organized crime and and so he kind of idealized as Castro without knowing all that much about him.

[00:25:06] So one of the things I say about Hemingway's political views is he's these are more like political attitudes than a political agenda. He's not drawing up a coherent political platform he has he has things that he likes more than others.

[00:25:23] And so he he's he's the I would say he's probably he he idolizes Castro and he doesn't.

[00:25:33] Who initially is non communist. Yes. His brother is an avowed communist from day one but Fidel himself is is just hard left but not all non communist hard left and a revolutionary which is fine with Hemingway. So at the end of his life a day after Castro takes power they get together they meet a couple of times once at a fishing expedition or a fishing competition run by Hemingway and Castro wins it apparently fairly. And they chat as Castro takes away all these old cups from this from this competition and then they exchange photographs so they sign a photograph and they sign the same photograph for each other. And Hemingway puts it on his piano with all the other photographs of famous people and friends that he's had over the years. Castro puts it on his wall. Castro only has two pictures on his wall after he takes power. One is that picture with Ernest and the other is his father. So you know kind of a kind of an important influence maybe maybe Castro. Maybe we should ask the Castro the story about how great great literature affected him or not. But eventually what this

sets Ernest up for is is a real conflict between are you. You know you've lived in Cuba since 1940. Your homes there your friends are there your daily routine is is is a Cuban routine basically.

[00:27:10] But he says I'm still a loyal American. And and so eventually he's got to decide. As Castro Castro either depending on your point of view he drops the veil and says OK I'm a communist. Or he becomes a communist. And he literally embraces Khrushchev in in 1960 at the U.N. and and Hemingway Hemingway can't have it both ways anymore you can't say I'm a loyal American and I love Cuba and I love living here American ambassador comes over to his house and says you know if you don't leave people are going to say that you're a traitor and that's a that's a red button word for him and a red flag. And part of the reason it's a red flag for him is that he's signed down with the NKVD in 1940. Nobody knew that except him. And and the Soviets. But it it makes him very sensitive to this kind of accusation. So his political life. Adds to the burdens that he's bearing at the end of his life. And I think it makes a serious difference it's not you know it's not just something that's going on in the background while he's living his life and struggling with his infirmities and his is mental illness. But it's something that that is interwoven in that and contributes to his suicide.

[00:28:36] In the end it didn't Castro say that for whom the bell tolls essentially functioned as sort of a how to guerrilla warfare manual for their early operations in Cuba.

[00:28:45] Yes he said he carried it and he carried the.

[00:28:49] He carried it in his backpack when he was in the hills. And I mentioned the suicide a couple minutes ago when he committed suicide. His wife initially put out the story that it was an accident that he was that he was just cleaning his guns and and made of a fatal miscalculation. And the so that there was a funeral in Idaho where he where he committed suicide. And every journalist in the world according to Emma Watson was there and our Emma was one of those guys and most of the journalists were trying to get their get their story by interviewing the people who were in the prominent people who were involved in the in the in the Hemingway family and they and the events. Emma Watson who as yet across sort of Seattle's answer to Andy Rooney. I think that's fair this sort of evenhanded crust or even crust there. Yeah. So Emma Watson says no no. Let's let's. Let me try something else. And so what he does is he goes to like the bar men you know the chauffeurs the units that of trying to interview the coroner. He interviews the coroner's secretary. That sort of thing. And he's the one who breaks the breaks the story of Hemingway's suicide. It wasn't an accident. It was suicide. And and he does it with the kind of detail that really puts the issue to rest once and for all. They had met once before he got Emmett got another day. There was a chance encounter in Idaho. But Emmett got a groundbreaking interview with Hemingway about his attitudes on Castro and going back to for whom the bell tolls for a moment when that was published.

[00:30:50] It alienated a lot of people that Hemingway had been supporters of the republic with because it seems like he was able to kind of it wasn't such a black and white story of the of the fascists being terrible and and Republicans being completely innocent. It was it was more nuanced than that and probably more realistic. But he alienated a lot of his close a couple of his close friends right.

[00:31:10] Absolutely more than more than a couple of it. Some of the people that he had been friendly with on the left Americans especially Americans. But not only Americans in Spain were extremely upset by the book and the way it described the the. It described it basically atrocities on both sides and and also portrayed some of the fascist figures as human beings. So they weren't just demonized. And I think this is you know this is a really interesting reflection of Hemingway in his own life in his own political attitudes. He had a tendency to see things in black and white. So you asked him about you asked him about Frank you gave you bottom a drink. You asked him about Franco you would get a denunciation of Franco in pretty strong terms and polarizing terms. But you make you ask him to write about it. You ask him to be a novelist and look at the same situation and he's going to be more nuanced he's going to show both sides. I think that's what makes him a great novelist. I think that's that's what makes that such a great book. It's he has a point of view. It's definitely identified with one side but he's not willing to go all the way and say hey my side is is is pristine.

[00:32:34] So I mean is there some direct relationship between the you know whether Ernest Hemingway was a traitor or not or whether you know signing up with the NKVD in 1940 was was something that he could have been sent to prison for. Does it matter when you think about his novels or do this his personal life stand separate from his work.

[00:32:52] So the short answer is to I think to stand separate except that in the 50s his agenda is his the things he writes about are not as politically charged in any way as for whom the bell tolls. So for whom the bell tolls a call to arms basically and then the books in the 50s late 40s crossed the river and into the trees which is basically can be summed up in two words I'm tired.

[00:33:25] And then there's the old man and the sea. And then there's books about hunting in Africa and and he writes is is he writes islands in the stream. And another book about bullfighting. So yeah there's there's two guys there. There's the there's the great novel is his he his work stand. I think his works are still great works. I don't think that's a I don't I don't feel fooled. I don't feel cheated that okay. Hemingway did this. And so now I don't want to. Now I don't like for whom the bell tolls or or the Sun Also Rises anymore. I would add the qualifier I don't I don't think you ever would. You know the the hard core spies the ones with access to the safes and who who took the secrets to the Soviets. That was a crime. You know they were they were abusing the public trust they were violating the Espionage statutes and when he wasn't in that you know he he wasn't in that category he would he might have been fined for not registering unlikely to go to jail.

[00:34:31] The biggest thing that would have hit him and hurt him would have been just the headline just the you know the the the news the the the accusation that he was a Soviet spy would have been just devastating to him because he he he doesn't think of himself as he thinks of itself as an antifascist crusader but he doesn't think of himself as a Soviet spy.

[00:34:58] So I mean his career was you know well documented he's for the man of large appetites and lots of you know giant giant gestures and there at the scene of all sorts of you know monumental events in the first half of the 20th century. Was he a happy guy.

[00:35:11] He thought so. I think he was. I think I'm not a psychiatrist and I don't pretend to be but I think there's a manic depressive cycle here. And when he signed up for the NKVD he's writing he feels terrifically empowered because he's written this great novel he's just gotten remarried. He married a younger woman ten years younger who's who's kind of who he went to Spain with and and he's he's just on top of the world. His book is selling like frozen frozen daiquiris in hell he says. And and then he you know and then just as he goes up we see him go down and it's cycles of Raul I think he lived fully. I don't think. I wouldn't characterize him as a happy man. All Things Considered. Know I think I think he. I don't know that we could talk about about this all night. But did he dive feeling fulfilled. Probably not. Probably probably felt there were things that he had not accomplished that he would have liked to have accomplished.

[00:36:22] Should we take some questions now.

[00:36:26] You won't have questions.

[00:36:30] The question is What did he do to spy. Did he spy on the U.S. for the Soviets. That's

[00:36:34] So he agreed to be a spy for the NKVD. Agreed to be an agent. Their idea was that they could use him to advance their political agenda in some way. And maybe support their spying in the United States. He never actually he agreed to do it. But he didn't do it.

[00:36:56] So he's like a guy who signs a contract to buy a house. You know that's when the realtors break out the champagne.

[00:37:03] But then he didn't show up for the closing. He didn't actually take possession of the house

[00:37:11] So the question is how much material do you find at the CIA library about Hemingway's activities so that the CIA library actually didn't have a whole lot about him it had a couple of books that have been published and were in the public domain.

[00:37:25] What I found was so there's parts of his NKVD file parts of his Soviet file are in the library of congress. It's a long story on how they got there.

[00:37:38] And then there's an FBI file. There are some o ss files about him. But the most telling things I found were I thought well the Soviet files is crucial to this story. But then what he says in his letters I mentioned all the letters early on in this talk. And and he talks about politics in his letters. And you can see a coherent pattern in his support for the Soviets he's willing to give them the benefit of the doubt on account of their support for the Spanish Republic. And you can also you also see in there you see hints that he drops about hey he's writing to his best friend. He drops hints about what he's what he's done for the Soviets. He doesn't come out and say Hey I was a spy for the Soviets. He says I did confidential work for them.

[00:38:32] Things like question is has the family responded. Not really. The family today is his son Patrick and is granddaughter

[00:38:46] And his former daughter in law the former daughter in law has heard a version of this the talk that you just heard. And she said I don't really know about that. But it doesn't it doesn't. It's quite plausible. The granddaughter said I just don't know about this. I don't focus on politics.

[00:39:10] The Patrick has not responded. The Hemingway society and foundation which he's a major figure of. Tends to focus more on his literary works and protecting copyright and and making sure that and publishing the letters. So I would love. I would love some kind of substantive response from the from traditional Hemingway scholars to you to either engage me and say hey this is you know I think I think you're wrong about this. Or or maybe maybe you could also go the other way and say hey I think you've come up with something that that's new and interesting

[00:40:49] So the short version of the question is where does to have and have not fit into this narrative.

[00:40:53] And how was that received when it was published to have and have now parts of it were originally published as short stories just before my my book starts with the hurricane. And then it was published as a book. After. So I think sometime in 1936 maybe thirty seven I agree with what you said. I read this this this. This goes along with

[00:41:18] The article that he wrote for The New Masses far left publication not communist but with a lot of communists on the masthead in the hurricane the anti-establishment hurricane that got him on the road to becoming a dedicated antifascist. So so basically yes they haven't have not was part of the process that we're talking about here is political awakening and his commitment to anti fascism

[00:41:49] So you're doing your homework. If you got Red Star Over Hollywood in your bookshelf.

[00:41:54] Yes I read that. That was Feliks question related to Feliks question a few minutes ago.

[00:42:01] That's. Hemingway honestly portrayed both sides in the Spanish Civil War and the people on the far left denounced him. So so your conventional American communist denounces him for that. The Soviets are more practical Soviets the Soviets said hey you know we have to look past this.

[00:42:20] They weren't they they didn't dislike Hemingway because he had criticized their man. And you know Marty was a was a bloodthirsty Commissar he was the kind of guy that that gave the Soviet Union and the Communist cause a bad name and they didn't have to do it. They could have you know. Anyway I don't get me started on the Spanish Civil War but they they probably could have gotten a whole lot more. You get you get more with a war as you get more with honey than vinegar. They probably could have gotten along gone a lot further in in achieving their aims in the Spanish civil war if they had been less heavy handed and this guy Marty was very heavy handed

[00:43:06] So the question is what actually did Hemingway do for the Russians as a spy for the NKVD.

[00:43:11] Ok.

[00:43:12] So they're in in the spy business the like one of the crucial events is the recruitment. It's sort of like signing the contract in real estate it's it's the it's the commitment that enables you to move forward with the deal. So he made that commitment then he did not live up to it what they would have wanted him to do would have been the sort of thing that I mentioned a little earlier they would have they the Soviets traditionally recruited somebody and then they would spend about a year trying to figure out exactly what he was good at. Could you could you maybe persuade somebody to write an article that is more favorable to our cause could you maybe lobby for some legislation.

[00:44:00] Could you maybe go to President Roosevelt his wife Martha Gellhorn was a good friend of Mrs. Roosevelt and Hemingway did go to the White House and talk about the Spanish Civil War. So the Soviets might say you know can you go back to the White House and maybe lobby suddenly for. This position or that position so he didn't do those things but those were the sort of things that they had in mind for him. He didn't do those things after he was recruited before he was recruited. He did some of those things when he was basically an advocate for the Spanish Republic user.

[00:44:39] He committed suicide were the women in his life privy to his espionage and what impact did they have on his life. Did my wife ask you to ask that. They were they were enormously important

[00:44:54] In his life. So before the Spanish Civil War he's married to Pauline Fifer Pauline Fifer is a devout Catholic from a conservative family from Arkansas.

[00:45:04] And then in the round about Christmas nineteen thirty six he beats Martha Gellhorn 10 years younger than he. And and Pauline who is about the same age. And she is more or less a feminist and she is a political point of view is left of center.

[00:45:30] And and she can't she. So her presence in his life makes it easier for him to open up to the left. So Pauline's family was in favor of the nationalists in Spain. The bad guys. Martha was in favor of the good guys. The antifascist. Did he ever tell them. So certainly didn't tell Pauline. And I mean he never told Mary. I'm convinced he never Mary was his last wife. He might have dropped some very broad hints the Martha. But I don't think he told her.

[00:46:08] He was pretty good at keeping a secret when he wanted to. And this is the kind of secret that he would have taken very seriously because as I say in the book he almost immediately realizes after he after he signs the contract he almost immediately realizes the possible consequences of going through with it.

[00:46:29] He just doesn't want. He doesn't want that headline Hemingway unmasked as Soviet spy. He doesn't want to hear what I'm talking about tonight.

[00:46:36] Any chance that he was playing the Soviets and trying to be kind of like beat him with their own espionage game.

[00:46:42] I don't think so for a couple of reasons.

[00:46:47] One is that he would have seen he all of his political activism as consistent. So it's not like he would have seen it all as antifascist activity.

[00:47:01] So you know it's maybe you you care about literacy so you contribute to this campaign and then you contribute to the other campaign. So he. So that's one reason I think he he was he was he thought he could control the relationship as he controlled so many things in his life. But I don't think he if he thought he was going to he was going to diddle the Soviets or deceive them in any way.

[00:47:28] The other thing is was that's a legitimate question. Was somebody on the U.S. side saying hey Ernest once you go go see what the Soviets are up to and tell them you work with them and we'll find out about it. The there's a couple problems with that theory that I've considered. One is that there's nobody really playing the counterintelligence game on the U.S. side. The FBI is just waking up to it at that point it's focused more on on Germans and fascists than on what the Soviets are doing. So bottom line I don't think I don't think that was that that's what was going on.

[00:48:08] I don't think there was a double and the last reason is his FBI file has no FBI file is is reasonably complete and fully available and there's no hint of that there. And you know you you would at least find a hint of it at the end of the last the last thing in his FBI file is handwritten by J Edgar Hoover and it is I know Hemingway was no communist. He was just a rough tough guy who always stood up for the underdog underdog. And it's amazing to me it's amazing that that he would take the time you know it was an A. He he's reading a typewritten report about Hemingway and he adds his own handwritten his own observations there

[00:48:56] And it's kind of the FBI his last word about Hemingway. So they you know two for the U.S. government to have run a double. They'd have to know they'd have to know what was going on. Right. You have to know that. You have to know about your target and we were we were helpless basically at the time we weren't smart enough to run doubles. And is the U.S. government's side of it.

[00:49:16] And Hemingway side of it is this was totally consistent with his antifascist activities are there any documents that you weren't able to find that you know probably existed at some point but aren't there anymore.

[00:49:27] Boy. So that might be another book. So there's there's a there's a couple of things. You know he's gonna have a Cuban file.

[00:49:39] It's just the Cuba is a a police state totalitarian state it's a it's it's the last of the old one.

[00:49:48] One of the last. There's not that there's one more old fashioned communist dictatorships. And so there's gotta be an enormous Hemingway file there. And I'll bet it goes so a lot of it's going to be about his house and you know his papers and things like that but I'll bet there's parts of that file that go back to the beginning where they talk about his support for Castro. So I'd love to see that. I don't think I'm going to live long enough to see that. I would love to see the original file in Moscow. But once again I don't think you know the hardliners are kind of the men have cemented their hold and I don't think there's gonna be any sort of government in the sunshine over there anytime soon. So those are two things I'd really like to see. There's a couple of collections of letters that I'm aware of that I haven't been able to see.

[00:50:39] But so you've given up on glasnost and perestroika. So what you're saying.

[00:50:43] Yeah. Any other questions for now anyway of the

[00:50:50] Ok. So it's two questions the first question is what. Talk more about Hemingway's relationship with his final wife Mary and how she was affected by suicide.

[00:50:58] The second question is is it possible that Martha Martha Gellhorn was working for the NKVD and was working to recruit Hemingway or otherwise it's a great question as I want to take them in reverse order. So was Gellhorn you know Gellhorn was left of center

[00:51:18] And France so guilt go home was a Eleanor Roosevelt Democrat.

[00:51:22] So and but she was too independent for the NKVD. And they she's covered in their files she's covered and denounced basically for being too independent and not the right kind of not the right kind of person for them. They didn't like really independent women. So I don't think she was. What's the what did the Soviets call sparrows swans sparrows.

[00:51:52] So Mary boy there's a there's a complicated relationship. I think that the short answer is she was devastated by a suicide. Absolutely devastated. And there's a couple of reasons.

[00:52:06] One is the obvious one the other is what was he working on at the end of his life. He's working on a Paris is a moveable feast. And one of the heroes of Paris is a moveable feast is his first wife. So there he is you know in 60 some years old. Living with his fourth wife and he's writing this rhapsody about life with his first wife. So Mary had a really tough time after after the suicide. She I don't know if she ever really came to terms with it.

[00:52:41] Other questions OK.

[00:52:45] You're saying it may be a loaded question but if Hemingway were writing today what might be his greatest concern.

[00:52:52] I've never heard that one before. That's a very good question.

[00:52:57] What would he be writing today. The easy answer is he.

[00:53:00] He's probably going to still write the kind of outdoor book that he liked to write action bullfighting fishing big game high net hunting. But what do you have written another politically engaged novel.

[00:53:17] And what would it have been. I don't know.

[00:53:20] There's you know he. The thing about the Spanish Civil War that makes it so you know there's something about the Spanish Civil War that resonated for his generation and continues to resonate to this day for people. I went to a talk about a great book called Spain in our hearts by a historian named Adam Hochschild. And the people in the audience were descendants of the Americans who had gone to fight in the Spanish Civil War. And it was like listening to a question and answer after the book talk was like listening to a conversation in nineteen thirty eight or thirty nine.

[00:54:01] Amazing. You know so. So if if I were to answer your question if there were an event like that that could have seized his imagination he might have written about it. He might have written my. You've written a great Vietnam novel maybe. Where would you come down on Vietnam. Probably you know it who. Who do you sympathize with in Vietnam. They're just you know do you like to do you like that. But there you have it. So there would be some there will be some Vietnam I think it was more complicated than the Spanish Civil War which is complicated enough but maybe the short answer to your question is if the were the right kind of all encompassing political event. Rich interesting political event he might have written a novel about that and I hope he would have portrayed both.

[00:54:53] I hope he would have come down on one side or the other clearly and I hope he would have fairly portrayed both sides great questions and maybe time for one and one more two more.

[00:55:05] You there ma'am the question is how do you come I've come across all these letters that reveal these intimate details of the story that you've told so a lot of the letters are in the Kennedy Library in Boston.

[00:55:22] Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. Hemingway were both widows in the mid 60s. And Mrs. Kennedy offered this as Hemingway a chance to keep her husband's papers in the same place. So it's a gorgeous place overlooking Boston Bay and the reading room Hemingway reading room is set up like his living room in Cuba and there's only three deaths so that's one place you do and there's there's just a lot a lot there nobody's mastered at all.

[00:55:56] There's there's so much but then you go looking in in odd places you you know a private collector who has sent me a couple of letters I know another private collector who has a stash of letters to these he's only shared one with me and and he's probably going to get a visit from me. He said I can come out and give a book talk but he hasn't said. Then after the book talk do I get to see the letters. So there are a lot of letters in Princeton the first biographer a first Hemingway biographer

was a professor. At Princeton and he collected a lot of letters and then Hemingway's best friend this General Buck Lanham. His letters were left to Princeton. So do you find them here in there and then and then you find interesting collateral collections you know that you don't expect like there was a Marine Corps officer who had the same editor as Hemingway and. So they wrote this guy John Thompson wrote to Max Perkins their mutual editor about Hemingway. So you find all kinds of interesting little bits little tidbits here and there and all a lot of this book was like putting together a crossword puzzle you may get a little tiny pieces of evidence you don't have you don't have a big you know a giant story or a giant source that that drives the whole thing you get a lot of little sources okay.

[00:57:28] Final question. Thanks for all your great questions. We have time for one more has given up on me. Tie you up here.

[00:57:34] No we have one more here why is Hemingway's death called a suicide. Is that the question.

[00:57:41] Or mischaracterize it so I guess further clarification about me mean so there are if you if you read his letter. So there's there's no suicide note per say there's no farewell cruel world. You know I've been disappointed by X and Y or I can't do a or b anymore and I'm I'm going to kill myself. There's nothing like that. There are broad hints that he starts to leave in in the months before he actually committed suicide and he makes suicide attempts that his you know married comes down one morning and finds he's got he's got one of his shotguns in one hand and there's two shotgun shells over here and he's just standing there.

[00:58:31] So his suicide was not a total surprise but there's no suicide letter per say to set that answer your question. There's a there's there's there's things that are close to suicide close to suicide notes but there's no conventional suicide note.

[00:58:49] All right.

[00:58:49] Thank you very much Nicholas rentals is the author of writer Sailor Soldier Spy. Thank you. Thank you to the library

[00:59:00] These days. Thank you Seattle Public Library. Thank you all for coming out this evening

[00:59:07] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.