YOUR KINDLE NOTES FOR:

Hemingway and Gellhorn

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> Another writer who visited the White House at this time was the well-known novelist H.G. Wells, who described it as a comfortable private house transformed by the Roosevelts from a “queer, ramshackle place like a nest of waiting rooms with hat stands everywhere.” Wells was already an old man of sixty-eight at this stage of his life. Along with Jules Verne he had been dubbed one of the “Fathers of Science Fiction,” the author of genre classics such as The War of the Worlds and The Time Machine. He was an outspoken socialist and pacifist who wrote about other things, including history and social problems, which resonated with Martha far more than his science fiction did. Wells was also a notorious womanizer with an eye that never ceased to wander. While married first to his cousin, then later to one of his former students, he conducted a series of affairs with many well-known women. They included birth-control activist Margaret Sanger and novelist Rebecca West, who was twenty-six years younger than him and bore him a son out of wedlock—Anthony West, who would go on to become a famous writer in his own right. In the White House, Wells’ eyes fastened on the youthful Martha and liked what they observed. How could they not? The man was an aging lecher, but his libido remained intact. Martha’s youth, her intelligence and physical allure were the perfect aphrodisiac for an old man approaching the seventh century of his life.

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> When she remained in Connecticut instead of sailing across the ocean to be with him, Wells decided to visit her to continue his entreaties in person. He arrived in Connecticut as snow was falling late in the autumn of 1935—and proceeded to drive her to distraction with his nonstop ranting that kept her from her work. He followed her around the house most of the day, talking constantly, beginning at breakfast with his theories about the ice age and ending at dinner with his thoughts about Henry James and his influence on American and British literature. Martha could stand it no longer. She sent a telegram to the famous comedian Charlie Chaplin, a friend of Wells, encouraging—begging—him to invite Wells for an extended visit to Hollywood. Luckily for her, Wells accepted, but not before informing her that she would be sorry when he was dead because she had not taken advantage of the opportunity to learn more about the world and about life from him. But three thousand miles of separation did not

deter Wells from his pursuit of her through his letters, any more than that distance mattered when he was on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

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But for Ernest, the issue was not so black and white. He was basically apolitical, non-ideological, anarchistic, a gut-level isolationist who thought that all wars were evil despite his mania to write about every one that erupted around the world. “Hemingway said he was neutral because he had friends on both sides,” said Welsh author Denis Brian. A major point of contention between Ernest and Pauline—and her entire family as well—was her staunch support of Franco simply because she was Catholic. All the Pfeiffers were devout Catholics, so when the Catholic Church stamped its Imprimatur on Franco and the nationalists, the Pfeiffers fell in line behind the Church. Ernest had converted to Catholicism when he married Pauline, but in his soul he was essentially a hedonistic pagan. Ernest had a way of weaseling around the issue when pressed too hard. He loved the pomp and ceremony of the Church and once remarked that Catholicism was the only religion worth taking seriously—assuming that you wanted to take any of them seriously in the first place. Indeed, he had been attracted to the Catholic Church ever since a young priest tended to him on the battlefield in Italy during World War I. Harry Sylvester, a Catholic writer who also claimed to be neutral at the time, remarked that Ernest and Pauline “had a real problem, which I never went into very much with him, about birth control. They seemed happy, but then he was on the verge of breaking up with her. They had separated and he was horsing around with Martha Gellhorn.” In

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Ernest had good company in Winston Churchill, who claimed he would welcome the devil himself as an ally in a righteous cause to defeat his enemy. It should be noted that the full extent of Stalin’s crimes against his own people was not yet fully apparent. Joris Ivens also recalled Ernest’s shift on the war. Once in Spain, Ivens said, Ernest weighed one side against the other and decided he was more anti-fascist than anything else. “He saw that most of his friends there, bullfighters and barmen and others he knew before the war, were fighting on the democratic, the republican side, against Franco and the nationalists.”

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Ernest’s attitude was that he was there to participate as well as to write. In almost every conflict he covered for one publication or another, he had a habit of bearing arms and risking his life to get closer to the real story and get it down just right. And he had

suffered enough injuries to prove it. In this conflict, he was more than just a journalist and armed combatant. He was also a spy working on behalf of the U.S. government.

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Ernest and Martha were both well aware of the atrocities committed on the republican side of the conflict as well as by the nationalists. Ernest would soon begin to work on a play set in the Florida Hotel, The Fifth Column, which depicted the torture of a rebel spy captured by the republicans. In his later novel about the Spanish Civil War, For Whom the Bell Tolls, Ernest's main character, Robert Jordan, laments the atrocities committed by both sides. George Seldes was euphoric in his praise of Ernest and his courage, describing him with glowing accolades.

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Early in the morning of May 26, Ernest departed in the Pilar on a fishing trip to Bimini with a couple of friends on board. Pauline flew over from Miami with their sons, Patrick and Gregory, for a few glorious days of hauling in fish and basking in the sun. While Ernest was in Bimini avoiding the subject of their disintegrating marriage in his conversations with Pauline, Martha was having lunch with Eleanor Roosevelt in Washington, D.C., on May 28. During their lunch, Martha asked if President and Mrs. Roosevelt would be interested in seeing The Spanish Earth when Ernest and Joris Ivens completed the film. If so, they would all be happy to come to Washington to show it to them. "Martha Gellhorn seems to have come back with a deep conviction that the Spanish people are a glorious people and something is happening in Spain which may mean much to the rest of the world," Mrs. Roosevelt wrote in her syndicated column. Joris worked on the film in New York and Ernest divided his time between his novel and the text for the film. The narration was supposed to be delivered by an up-and-coming actor named Orson Welles, who would become famous a year later with his radio broadcast of H.G. Wells's The War of the Worlds, and a few years after that with his starring role in Citizen Kane. But after listening to Orson's voice-over, Ernest was dissatisfied and agreed to narrate it himself. "Orson Wells was supposed to do it," Ernest told movie director John Huston a few years later. "Orson, eh," said Huston. "And why didn't he do it?" "Well, John," Ernest answered, clearing his throat. "Every time Orson said the world infantry it sounded like a cocksucker swallowing."

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Southard, in particular, was astonished at how quickly Ernest grasped what it took others years to learn for themselves. After picking all their brains, Ernest formulated a comprehensive view of the military dynamics at work throughout the country. Ernest

reported in his dispatches to Washington that it was “seemingly inevitable” that the Japanese would invade Southeast Asia some time in 1941. They would not attack in summer or early autumn, he predicted, since that was typhoon season. He dismissed other months as unlikely and stated that December was the only month that made military sense to him.

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His forecast was spot on. It landed on Morgenthau’s desk and, by extension, on the desk of Harry Dexter White. Ernest had no way of knowing at the time—nor did Southard or anyone else in government for that matter—that White was a Soviet spy who would later be accused of espionage.

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