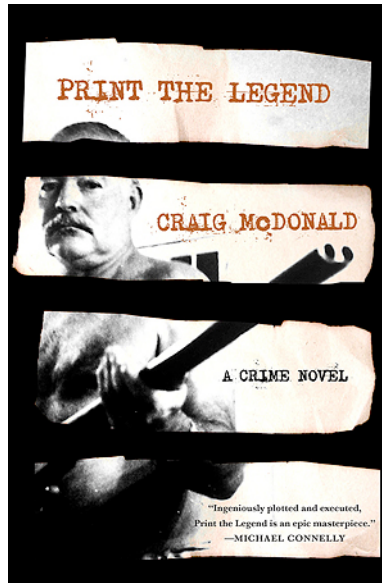

PAULSON:
ANN ARBOR, MI., 1965



“The power of accurate observation is commonly called cynicism by those who have not got it.”

— George Bernard Shaw

SLEUTH

While boxing papers for storage, Hannah unearthed some of Richard Paulson’s early, undistinguished stabs at fiction. She found the bones of three novels, each appended with ridiculously extravagant, multi-page outlines — compositional devices more appropriate to elaborate, mystery potboilers than attempts at middle-of-the-20th-Century, postmodern literature. Fiction, Hannah decided after reading all three holographs, was decidedly not the professor’s *métier*. Given Richard’s mixed estimations

of Hannah's literary efforts, she was left angered by the professor's own undistinguished early attempts at fiction.

The drought had finally ended. Night after rainy night, Hannah, who had always loved the rain, sat by the open window. She savored the night sounds and scent of the steadily falling rain...the sound of tires on slick streets and the rainwater tumbling through the copper downspout next to her window as she combed through various biographies and collections of Papa's journalism and letters.

She searched each book for references to suicide and Papa's miscellaneous treatments of — or comments on — the somber subject.

In 1926, Papa published his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, a novel set mostly in the month of July. In it, Robert Cohn says pointedly to Jake Barnes, Papa's fictional stand-in, that in about "35 years more" he — Jacob/Papa — will "be dead." Why not 30 years, 40, or 50? Hannah did the math and was chilled to find it set the death date in July 1961. Why 35 years, specifically placing the death in summer of 1961? Was Hemingway planning his own exit strategy that far ahead?

Of course suicide was woven through Papa's books and stories after his own father killed himself in the late 1920s. To friends, Papa talked about killing himself constantly, and chatted about it with chilling casualness. "What a disgust it will be," he told one, to have to "shoot myself, maybe soon." Forced to acknowledge what a bad example it would likely set for his children, Papa qualified, just a bit, saying said he would instead probably "arrange to be shot."

When Papa survived two African plane crashes in less than 24-hours in 1954 — and been reported in both crashes — he was dismayed by the frequent references in

various of his spurious obituaries to his ongoing “pursuit of death,” Papa expressed incredulity at the notion one could truly seek death for most of an adult life and not “have found her” before reaching the age of 54.

By 1960, life for Papa had become an electroshock, strobe-lit nightmare. In April 1961, Mary spent an hour talking to Papa, stalling until his doctor was scheduled to arrive — all the while Papa held a shotgun cradled in his arm.

But, the gun was unloaded throughout the ordeal.

On his way back to the Mayo Clinic, at an airstrip in Rapid City, South Dakota, Papa walked toward the spinning prop of a plane after failing to find a stray gun in a hangar.

The blades slowed to a stop before Papa reached them.

Unloaded guns were reportedly wrestled from Papa on more than one occasion during the last year of his life.

He told friend after friend that he had nothing left to live for.

Nothing at all.

Through it all, during those last terrible months, he attacked and berated Mary, who stayed and took it.

Before he came home to Ketchum from the Mayo Clinic that last time in the summer of 1961, Mary had all of the guns in the house locked in a storeroom in the cellar.

But she hid the key to the storeroom in plain sight — placing it on a kitchen windowsill.

Mary later cryptically said that she hadn't hidden the key, because, "No one had a right to deny a man access to his possessions."

On the morning of July 2, 1961, Ernest Hemingway was found shot to death in the foyer of his Ketchum home and the earth moved.

Mary's first public pronouncement: "I feel certain that this, in some incredible way, was an accident."

John Steinbeck and Robert Frost bought Mary's account of the shooting as an ironic accident.

The matador Juan Belmonte knew better, and said, "Well done." Belmonte was spotted in July of 1961 in a restaurant in Seville, reading a newspaper account of Papa's death. "The glories were past for him," Belmonte said. "It was time." The matador, who was seventy and in failing health himself, said he was facing the prospect of being deprived the three things in life that he still enjoyed: making love, riding horses and fighting bulls. Following a Sunday mass, Belmonte visited his mistress, rode his favorite horse and fought seven bulls.

He then wrote a suicide note and shot himself.

Papa had said something similar to a friend shortly before his own death by gunshot: "What does a man care about? Staying healthy. Working good. Enjoying himself in bed. I haven't any of them.... If I can't exist on my own terms, then existence is impossible."

No one had a right to deny a man access to his possessions.

Papa left no note.

Dr. Scott Earle was called at 7:40 a.m. to pronounce Papa dead.

They embalmed what was left of Papa in Hailey, the birthplace of Ezra Pound — one of his early mentors and the only one spared Papa's post-success enmity.

An entryway peppered with the brains, blood, teeth and powder-burned bone shards of America's greatest writer.

But no true inquest.

Closed autopsy reports.

No paraffin tests performed on Mary's aged hands.

Mary... alone in the house with him at the time of the shooting.

According to brother Leicester, one of Papa's sons cut up the shotgun that killed his father, then repeatedly drove over it with a truck, utterly destroying the weapon before it could become a morbid "memento."

Carlos Baker, the biographer Mary chose for Papa, told a different story: A family friend allegedly claimed the rifle for Mary after it had been held by the local sheriff a couple of weeks. The friend cut the gun up with a blowtorch and buried the pieces in a place known only to himself.

The remains apart from the corpse were quickly cleaned up by friends and burned. The expunging of any evidence of the death was so swift and thorough that Papa's sister, Sunny, marveled that she could find no evidence of the carnage that had stained the foyer just hours before her arrival.

The weapon destroyed; forensic evidence expunged.

That woman. That sad crazy old man... alone in that concrete bunker...

As the rain drifted from a downpour to drizzle, Hannah dialed Mary's number.

<http://www.craigmcdonaldbooks.com/legend.php>

