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"I WAS VERY ILL … . AM WORKING HARD": DISABILITY AND DENIAL IN ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S LETTERS TO HIS POLISH TRANSLATOR

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ABSTRACT

In November 1958 Ernest Hemingway invited his Polish translator, Bronisław Zieliński to spend three days in Ketchum, Idaho. At the age of 44, Zieliński was visiting the United States for the first time in his life, under the auspices of the Ford Foundation. When Hemingway received Zieliński's first letter and called him back, just a week before the actual meeting, he sensed in the translator a kindred spirit, with whom he could share his passion for literature and hunting. The corpus of personal documents testifying to the friendship between Hemingway and Zieliński, which was cut short by the author's death, consists of thirty-one surviving letters, notes, cards, and telegrams, as well as Zieliński's travel diary and numerous photographs.

This article focuses on the marginalization of health issues in the correspondence between Hemingway and Zieliński. Disability – both physical and cognitive – is the tip of the iceberg that Hemingway repeatedly obscures with accounts of work (that must be done); work thus becomes the antidote to any weakness. Zieliński, for his part, reflects this attitude. The letters show that the novelist was aware of the race against time, but the two correspondents were also racing against the growing paranoia of the Cold War, which appears in their letters as an unnamed and insurmountable global disability that subsumes and overshadows personal challenges of a physical or cognitive nature. Both Hemingway and Zieliński were careful not to reveal too much political opinion in their letters (which might have been read by one or more secret services). Zieliński, however, tends to misinterpret Hemingway's silence, due to bouts of mental illness, in the context of Cold War hostilities. From today's perspective, this (mis)reading amounts, on the one hand, to politicizing disability and, on the other, to conceptualizing the Cold War as a form of disability of the global order, incapacitating communication between friends.

Keywords: Ernest Hemingway, Bronisław Zieliński, letters, translation, Cold War

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Ernest Hemingway's intuitions and gut reactions, reflected in his fiction and private documents, predate the rise of disability studies – and the concomitant shift from the medical to the social model of disability – by several decades. This is an obvious fact, but one worth keeping in mind when evaluating his choices – right or wrong – from the vantage point of today's knowledge. His characters often face and push the limits of human courage and perseverance, overcoming their weakness, illness, or old age. They all follow in the footsteps of their creator, who knew his vulnerability and chose to defy it. In this article, I intend to trace the patterns of such defiance in the novelist's letters to his Polish translator, Bronisław Zieliński, who visited Hemingway in Ketchum in November 1958 and remained his (pen)friend until 1961. The novelist's correspondence with Zieliński is rarely quoted today because Hemingway had closer friends to whom he revealed more details of his life than he did to a Polish translator. Nevertheless, a handful of letters left behind as a material sign of this friendship allows the reader today to look at the writer's disability from an unexpected perspective, at once medical and social. Adhering to the medical conceptualization of disability, readers and doctors have repeatedly attempted to diagnose Hemingway, not only during his lifetime but also after his suicidal death. Yet the question of how he coped with trauma, impairment, and disability remains a matter of conjecture, balancing precariously on fictional analogies and personal accounts. Suspended between fact and fiction, as letters usually are, the correspondence between Hemingway and Zieliński calls for an interpretation encompassing a panorama larger than the usual exploration of individual medical challenges.

The persistence of the medical perspective is evident in the widely acclaimed 2017 biography of Ernest Hemingway by Andrew Farah, MD, which offers a forensic psychiatric examination of the novelist's "very brain cells – the stressors, traumas, chemical insults, and biological changes" (Worrell). Farah seeks to prove that the famous author had an organic brain disease, which is why the two courses of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) shortly before his death, worsened his condition instead of improving it (Farah 2017: 5); "ECT would have been curative for a case of psychotic depression, not his mixed-etiology dementia" (Farah 2017: 153). Hemingway, Farah argues, suffered from chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) as a result of many severe concussions throughout his life: his first major blast-type blow during World War I, his second major – Paris skylight accident in 1928, the third major – London car accident, the fourth and fifth major – World War II blast and impact, the sixth major – Cuba car accident, the seventh major – fall on the fishing boat *Pilar*, and the eighth and ninth major – two consecutive plane crashes during his 1954 African safari (Farah 2017: 28–35), not to mention the inevitable injuries while riding his bicycle as a child, boxing, or playing football as a young man, and hunting in later years. From a medical perspective, Farah concludes that all of these numerous incidents had a

cumulative effect and led to the progression of CTE (Farah 2017: 39–40, 101). Compounding the situation were Hemingway's alcoholism, his obesity, his diabetes first diagnosed at the Mayo Clinic, and the dramatic fluctuation in his blood pressure. Farah devotes an entire chapter to the posthumously published *A Moveable Feast* to show that CTE and mixed (vascular and alcoholic) dementia took a toll on Hemingway's writing ability (Farah 2017: 130–142). The heavily edited *Moveable Feast*, Farah argues, does not come anywhere near his best novels and short stories. "Without appreciating his diagnosis", Farah posits – "it is understandable that Hemingway would be perceived as an artist who is incomplete and underdeveloped – a man 'manqué'" (Farah 2017: 132).

Farah's was not the first attempt to diagnose Hemingway. The past decades have seen the rise of "a cottage industry in diagnoses seeking to define the reasons for Hemingway's visible decline throughout his final decade, particularly in 1960–1961, and the role of this deterioration in his suicide" (Wood 2020: 132). In 2006, Christopher Martin published "Ernest Hemingway: A Psychological Autopsy of a Suicide" in the journal *Psychiatry*. Before Farah, the novelist had been described as suffering from, among other diseases, bipolar disorder, which Farah (2017: 7, 11, 43) argues was not his real problem; alcoholism, which was only part of his health problems (Farah 2017: 7, 41–52); and hemochromatosis (Farah 2017: 100–101); Sebastian Dieguez (2010: 184–185) also considers it as one of the possibilities in his psychological and psychiatric evaluation of Hemingway. In addition to the many factors that contributed to Hemingway's demise, he was also a descendant of suicidal men on both sides of his family (Farah 2017: 10). In his biographical case study, Farah attempts to set the medical record straight by interviewing doctors who treated Hemingway, and analyzing his fiction, all other biographies, memoirs, and letters.

According to Farah, Hemingway took an interest in his condition and clearly described in his letters the symptoms of post-concussive syndrome, such as persistent headaches, sensory changes, double vision, and irritability (Farah 2017: 34, 36–40, 51, 126). After the two back-to-back plane crashes in Africa, he wrote in a letter from Kenya: "This is a funny thing. Maybe – concussion is very strange – and I have been studying it: Double vision; hearing comes and goes, your capacity for scenting (smelling something) can become acute beyond belief" (qtd. in Farah 2017: 37 & Baker 1981: 828). It seems unimportant to Farah to whom the letter is addressed, as if Hemingway would have sent the same message to anyone, which is not true. Farah never mentions the name of the friend to whom Hemingway both describes his condition and minimizes it as a "funny thing". The addressee of the letter, as found in Carlos Baker's collection of letters, is Bernard Berenson (1865–1959), much older than Hemingway, an internationally recognized American specialist in Renaissance art, born into a Jewish family in Lithuania. Hemingway exchanged letters with him from 1949 to 1957, but the

two correspondents never met for reasons explained by Jobst Knigge in his article (Knigge 2022). When Hemingway announced his intention to visit the man he admired for his education and taste at his Villa I Tatti in Florence, Berenson piled up obstacles and excuses. Nevertheless, he was honest with himself when he wrote in his diary: "I fear he [Hemingway] may turn out too animal, too overwhelmingly masculine, too Bohemian. He may expect me to drink and guzzle with him and write me down as a muff" (qtd. in Knigge 2022).

It has become a critical tradition to see Hemingway as a "trauma artist," someone whose life and writing "were repeatedly informed by trauma – the celebrated World War I injuries being most central to the art" (Farah 2017: 26). Hemingway's strategy for dealing with his disability was underpinned by the deep-seated principles of machismo. He took note of his condition and minimized the trauma, as can be seen in his message to Berenson. In public, he discredited and often ridiculed theories that emphasized the influence of war trauma on his novels. For example, in an interview with George Plimpton, he elegantly and ironically takes exception to the biographer Ernest Young's "wound theory" (see Plimpton 1958). The elegance of his objection (which contrasts sharply with his usual, rather straightforward and often rude responses) is a consequence of his earlier concession; when Young appealed to Hemingway in a letter, begging his approval and claiming that his academic career and his livelihood depended on the publication, the novelist reluctantly "allowed the book to go forward" (Kale & Spanier 2020: 51). However, Young – "himself a combat veteran" – became "the single most influential Hemingway critic" of the mid-twentieth century (Beegel 1996: 275), and although his psychoanalytic treatment of the novelist's life and work was controversial, it persisted in the popular imagination. It seems that although Young gave his reading of Hemingway a consistent psychoanalytic framework (which was also done in Leon Edel's biography of Henry James), the "unflattering portrayal of a credulous and accident-prone" Hemingway was adopted from Gertrude Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) (Kale & Spanier 2020: 56; see comment in footnote 7 in Spanier et al. 2024: 36–37).

Hemingway protested this label, but he also provided evidence in his letters that the label might be at least partially accurate. In a letter to Archibald MacLeish dated August 13, 1934, Hemingway wrote that he was "so tired of hearing about affect [sic] of war on young boy and care nothing about early childhood record in manly sports" (Spanier et al. 2024: 35). At the same time, in the letters of the mid-1930s, he refers to his "lousy head" (Spanier et al. 2024: 452), "damned head" (Spanier et al. 2024: 324) and being "dead in the head" (Spanier et al. 2024: 177), as if to confirm Farah's claim about the consequences of concussive injuries. And yet, more common in the letters of this period are phrases signaling the pressure of work: "(been/was/working) over my head (in work/ing/writing)" (Spanier et al. 2024: 197, 446, 448, 482, 483). Twenty years later, Hemingway

was equally reluctant to acknowledge health problems, even though he was "beleaguered by a myriad of physical and mental ills" (Wood 2020: 130). Sarah Anderson Wood describes how the rise of trauma studies in the 1990s provided over the recent decades "new strategies for understanding the impact of Hemingway's physical and cognitive vulnerabilities" (Wood 2020: 131). However, one must also acknowledge Hemingway's (apparently inadequate) efforts to come to terms with his condition, its conceptualization, and its impact on his life and work.

Hemingway's resistance to acknowledging trauma needs to be seen in the larger context of popular perceptions of disability in the United States before and after World War II. Drawing on Michael D. Gambone's 2005 study, Tracy R. Worrell points to the shift in American society's attitudes toward disability between the 1930s and 40s, when "it was still very common to institutionalize individuals for even mild cognitive disabilities" and the post-WW II situation, when "the United States saw a return of veterans with physical and cognitive disabilities" (Worrell 2018: 7). And yet, as she shows with reference to earlier research, the presence of people with disabilities in the exploding popular media (by 1958, 83.2% of households had a television, Baughman 1993, qtd. in Worrell 2018: 7) remained marginal in the 1950s and 60s (Worrell 2018: 8–9). Doris Zames Fleischer and Frieda Zames begin with a similar observation in their preface to the first edition of *The Disability Rights Movement: From Charity to Confrontation* (2001). They point to the widespread neglect of disability as one of the prejudices that dominate American life. While anti-Semitism, racism, sexism, and homophobia had been recognized (perhaps grudgingly) by the late 20th century, disability continued to be overlooked. "Perhaps this oversight", they argue, "stems from a collective fear of disability since everyone is subject to illness, accident, the declining powers of advanced age – all forms of human vulnerability" (Fleischer & Zames 2011: xix). Quoting Paul Longmore's presentation at the Disability Studies Colloquium in New York City Hunter College School of Social Work (December 5, 1997), Fleischer and Zames distinguish the following patterns of popular reactions: "This denial of the reality of disability results in stereotypes that continue to prevail. Films present people with disabilities either condescendingly as 'inspirational,' endeavoring to be as 'normal' as possible by 'overcoming' their limitations, or as disfigured monsters 'slashing and hacking their way to box office success'" (Fleischer & Zames 2011: xix). This is hardly surprising, given the desperate efforts of Americans with disabilities to cure or overcome their conditions. The deafblind Helen Keller (1880–1968) and Annie Sullivan (1866–1936), her "Teacher," devoted their lives to proving that the sky was the limit for people with seemingly insurmountable impairments (Fleischer & Zames 2011: 31–32; see also Emerson 2021). Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945), the longest-serving U.S. president (1933–1945) did his best to hide his disability. As Fleischer and Zames point out, "The continuing

public self-deception regarding Roosevelt's disability is dramatically illustrated by the decision to create a Washington, D.C. memorial depicting FDR as though he were not a wheelchair user" (Fleischer & Zames 2011: 2).

When Hemingway unexpectedly found a friend in his guest from behind the Iron Curtain in 1958, it was on the safe ground of writing, translating, and hunting, all activities that seemed to keep disability at bay and help defy it. The translator Bronisław Zieliński (1914–1985) was a late bloomer due to external political circumstances. He studied law at the University of Warsaw and graduated in 1938 (Marzec 2008: 17). He was then drafted into the Officer Cadet School of the Cavalry Reserve (Marzec 2010), whose mission was to train the Polish elite (graduates of secondary schools and universities, many of them representatives of the Polish gentry) to become commanders of military units during the looming war. When World War II broke out in 1939, Poland was attacked first by Nazi Germany and then by the Soviet Union. Zieliński, who was twenty-five at the time, was captured by the Soviet army (Marzec 2010) and narrowly escaped extermination by the notorious NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs), the Soviet law enforcement agency. After World War II, Poland became a satellite state of the Soviet Union, and Zieliński's pre-war training as a lawyer or military commander did not count for much. He worked for several cultural institutions, including the National Museum in Warsaw and a press agency, until he was falsely accused of conspiracy and espionage and arrested in 1947 (Michałowska 1997: 149; Marzec 2008: 47). He managed to survive the brutality of a notorious Stalinist prison (Marzec 2008: 41–45). Released in 1950, he was rehabilitated a decade later (Marzec 2008: 49–50). In the early 1950s, he found a niche that seemed relatively safe from political pressure; he invented himself as a translator. The invention was followed by hard work that soon catapulted him into the highest echelons of Polish translators. He was ambitious and talented. The first book he translated into Polish and published in 1951 was Jack Lindsay's historical novel about the reign of Mary Tudor, *Fires in Smithfield* (1950). His next translation project was none other than Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Thorough research and meticulous editing became Zieliński's trademark from the beginning.

At the age of forty-four, Zieliński visited the USA for the first time in his life, thanks to the auspices of the Ford Foundation (Marzec 2008: 255). He had entered the translation profession only seven years earlier, but in that short time, he had become Hemingway's most prominent translator in Poland. He hoped to meet Hemingway in the United States, and following the advice of the writer's editor at Scribner's, in early October 1958 Zieliński plucked up enough courage to write a letter to the famous man (see Zieliński's letter to Hemingway dated October 7, 1958 (a letter from New York City, qtd. in Marzec 2008: 202). Contrary to Zieliński's worst fears, the response was immediate and heartfelt when his letter finally reached Hemingway in Ketchum, Idaho (forwarded from Cuba).

Lloyd R. Pappy Arnold, Hemingway's friend and neighbor in Ketchum, offers a few vignettes of the novelist and his translator's friendship in his memoir. He recalls how at the end of October 1958, Papa sprained an ankle while "climbing over a high tight-wire fence" (Arnold 1968: 221). Arnold remarks that Hemingway was not too disgruntled; he "said he'd spend the time working, goddamn it, and he did, hobbled about on an old cane" (Arnold 1968: 222). Being incapacitated in a physical sense, allowed him to focus on his writing and appreciate recovery all the more. He did not take long to recuperate and was soon hunting again. One day when "coming from hunting on his first day out after the accident", the novelist picked up "a letter from his Polish translator in Warsaw, Poland, a man he did not know, not even his name. … His hopes were that perhaps he might have the opportunity of meeting Mr. Hemingway, if only to get acquainted, say, in New York. There was no business attached. … The letter was late when Papa got it; the man was in Los Angeles for several days. He got him on the phone at once, learned that he would be in San Francisco on November 10 with some free time – he was committed for the following Monday. I heard no part of it until Papa had hung up the phone, his coat, said suddenly, "This man I'd like to know, he's no interrupter …" (Arnold 1968: 222).

Hemingway discovered that in addition to literature, he shared with Zieliński a passion for hunting, which the translator had not indulged in since before the war. Hemingway took pity on him and organized Zieliński's visit not so much as a literary symposium as a series of hunting trips. In his diary, Zieliński repeatedly remarks how terrified he was by the inadequacy of his hunting skills (Zieliński 2008: 139, 141) and by the injury to his leg that he suffered while hunting with Hemingway, which he hid as best he could (Zieliński 2008: 143, 147). One can imagine that similar fears may have haunted Hemingway, and he was equally intent on hiding and pushing them aside. Both sought to control their temporary disabilities, and the best way to show their mastery was to demonstrate both strength and vigilance while hunting. As Hemingway repeatedly emphasizes and Zieliński notes in his diary, hunting is carried out for the sake of ecological balance and with respect for all living organisms (see Zieliński 2008: 153). Hunting is about killing and not about incapacitation. From these remarks, then, it emerges as a way of killing disability: one's own and that of animals that are incapacitated.

Zieliński's diary is a treasure trove of information gathered through conversation and observation. Some of Hemingway's remarks, preserved in his translator's diary, fit perfectly with Farah's theory. At least twice during this brief visit, Hemingway referred to skulls and skull injuries as if diagnosing his own case, much in line with Farah's argument. For example, in recalling his accidents, Hemingway recalls observing the unusual thickness of the skulls of Polish soldiers during the Spanish Civil War. He hastens to distinguish these proletarian

skulls from Zieliński's, presumably aristocratic skull, and adds as an afterthought: "Yours would be probably unusually thin" (Zieliński 2008: 132). Referring to his two back-to-back crashes in Africa four years earlier, Hemingway concludes with a smile that it was probably not too good for a writer to have been hit on the head so often (Zieliński 2008: 148). One can sense in these notes Zieliński's eagerness to learn as much as possible about the author whose fiction he was translating. He made the most of the few days of personal contact. After he left the United States, the author and his translator exchanged letters, but their correspondence was, predictably, erratic due to personal and international difficulties. The postal channel of communication exposed the tenuous political situation between the U.S. and the Soviet bloc, often creating an analogy between Hemingway's unstable health and Zieliński's fears.

The corpus of personal documents testifying to the friendship between Hemingway and Zieliński, which lasted until the author's death, consists of thirty-one surviving letters, notes, cards, and telegrams, as well as Zieliński's travel diary and numerous photographs. Twelve of these documents were sent by Hemingway, of which nine are autographs (eight letters and one short note). The main theme of these letters is hunting, writing seems to come second, but health is also an interrelated motif. In a letter from Cuba dated April 12, 1959, Hemingway apologizes for his delay in writing and offers two excuses: hunting and work. In his letter, he also boasts of his excellent health, giving details: "Am down to 200 lbs now. … My kidneys and liver are the best they have been in years (since the crashes)" (Michałowska 1997: 79). He cites his results: blood pressure (140/68), cholesterol (285) and remarks in parentheses: "(very strange old carcass – responds to any training or care)" (Michałowska 1997: 79). The letter of June 24, 1959, sent from Malaga in Spain begins again with apologies and excuses: "Have been working hard and travelling very much and I ought to have 2 secretaries to handle things right" (Michałowska 1997: 87). Two months later (August 24, 1959), again from Malaga, Hemingway writes about his plan to return to Ketchum "for the shooting & working season. I have much work to do after this summer" (Michałowska 1997: 95). In the last two sentences, the novelist thanks Zieliński for his telegram "about the crash". Hemingway downplays it and ends sententiously: "There was no-one hurt & that is all that matters in crashes" (Michałowska 1997: 95).

After these reassuring messages, it takes Hemingway almost half a year to answer Zieliński's letters. The tone of his short letter, written in Cuba on February 15, 1960, is a departure from the previous, mostly upbeat missives. The wrong date is an obvious signal that Hemingway is not quite in control. He wrote 1959 instead of 1960. After the usual apologies, he writes: "We have had different forms of trouble & I have been working very hard" (Michałowska 1997: 99). This time Mary fractured her arm, and Hemingway was taking care of her and their

daily routine. Five days later he sends a short note (with the right date of February 20, 1960) and with an upbeat message confirming the receipt of Zieliński's letter and with the good news that "Mary's arm is really doing very well and that I am working very hard and I hope well" (Michałowska 1997: 102). In a letter of April 16, 1960 (sent from Cuba), Hemingway admits that he is a poor correspondent because of hard work but denies that he would ever want to break off communication (Michałowska 1997: 106). And yet, the communication broke off again for over 10 months.

His next short letter to Zieliński is dated February 24, 1961. Hemingway blames his lawyer Alfred Rice for keeping all the correspondence and writes openly: "I was very ill in the Mayo hospital at Rochester Minnesota but would certainly have sent you a cable of congratulations" (Michałowska 1997: 109). It was a response to Zieliński's cable of December 2, 1960, in which the translator (proudly) informed the novelist about the Pen Club Prize he received for his translations of Hemingway's fiction. This time illness (without any details) is blamed for the delay: "I have been a very bad correspondent but I was very ill and will not bore you with the details. Am working hard have to make up for the lost time" (Michałowska 1997: 109). Hemingway's motto: "Il fault d'abord durer" seems to determine his attitude toward health issues. However, the mention of illness or accident is never the last word. It is always topped off with the declaration that there is work to be done, and that work is both an obligation and a salvation.

Zieliński's attitude toward limitation and weakness is similar to Hemingway's. He chose translation and made it his profession in his late thirties. This, too, was an act of defiance against limitations. After the Second World War and the resulting redistribution of world power, Zieliński's pre-war training as a lawyer and army officer was of little value in the new People's Republic of Poland. He resisted the temptation to become a writer and chose the less spectacular but still powerful profession of translator. In this letter, Zieliński mirrors Hemingway's attitude toward work. All his letters testify to his intense activity as both a translator and an advocate of American literature in Poland. He rarely writes about his work as work, accepting his status as a mere translator, but in a letter dated April 12, 1959, he remarks that translating helps him overcome grief, as, for example, after his father's death. In a letter of February 1, 1960, Zieliński regrets that the correspondence has ceased; he will soon begin translating Hemingway's stories and will miss the opportunity to ask questions.

Pappy Arnold recalls in his memoir how Hemingway "rather wistfully" commented on meeting Zieliński soon after his departure: "'Wouldn't it be great, and good for the world, if all of it could be like that … if I say so myself, it's been an experience in human relations with Bron here.' He did not lose touch with him, either, nor did we" (Arnold 1968: 228). Both Hemingway and Zieliński were

aware of the political divide and seemed to enjoy those few days in Ketchum in November 1958, when the Iron Curtain did not matter to the famous novelist and his Polish translator. Zieliński had been apprehensive about meeting Hemingway and was surprised that the meeting turned into a real friendship (Michałowska 1997: 9). His late letters suggest that as the correspondence diminished, the fear that political tensions would again threaten this friendship seemed to increase. Zieliński continues to write. In his letter of February 1, 1960, he expresses his hope that Hemingway will write to him again. In his letter of February 10, 1960, he responds to the information he found in a newspaper about Hemingway's return to Cuba and his distinguished guests. In this short letter, he also expresses his concern that he may have inadvertently offended Hemingway, which, he suspects, led to the cessation of their correspondence.

Finally, Hemingway responds. On February 20, 1960, he sends a short note, adding under his signature: "All visitors very pleasant" (Michałowska 1997: 102). Neither Zieliński nor Hemingway writes directly about the visitor, who was Anastas Ivanovich Mikoyan, the Soviet First Deputy Minister, with his entourage. Like Khrushchev, Mikoyan is associated with the "thaw", i.e., political reforms aimed at de-Stalinizing Soviet international policy. His visit to Cuba in February 1960 had to do with the Cuban Revolution and negotiations on economic and trade agreements, as well as the withdrawal of IL-28 bombers (Garthoff 2011: 101). Fidel Castro understandably opposed this move, but the Soviet politician did not relent and stayed in Havana for more than three weeks. He did not even return to Moscow for his wife's funeral (Garthoff 2011: 101). The Soviets' celebration of Hemingway can be seen as a symbolic act of claiming him as their own. They seemed to be discovering the soft power of cultural relations.

The letter of February 24, 1961, was Hemingway's last letter to Zieliński. The novelist was racing against time and illness, but both correspondents were also racing against Cold War paranoia, which, significantly, is never mentioned in their letters. "Distinguished guests" are the tip of the iceberg. The Cold War hostilities are an unnamed and insurmountable global disability that subsumes and overshadows personal challenges of a physical or cognitive nature. Zieliński's letters show that he misinterprets Hemingway's silence as a political gesture. Hemingway's disability finally openly acknowledged with the usual "there is work to be done" tag, acquires a political aspect. From today's perspective, this (mis)reading on the part of Zieliński amounts to politicizing disability, on the one hand, and conceptualizing the Cold War as a form of disability of the global order, incapacitating communication between friends, on the other.

Shannon Walters's disability studies perspective on Kenneth Burke's linguistic pedagogy in the face of the Cold War (with its pressures for strength and competition) may, perhaps, lead to a belated recognition that the medical and social parameters of Hemingway's and Zieliński's disabilities influenced their

correspondence. Both Hemingway and Zieliński were clearly prizing ableism, but the impact of the Cold War exposed "ambition as a disease" (Burke 1955: 272, qtd. in Walters 2018: 230). According to Walters, Burke favors the student who "droops" and "broods" (Walters 2018: 224). Despite the usual pejorative connotation, drooping is beneficial because it "leaves room for change and flexibility" (Walters 2018: 233). It is "muscular" in that it allows one "to think in new ways, to experience different perspectives and not cling too closely to one point of view" (Walters 2018: 234–235). Aligned with drooping, brooding "occasions an alternative, slower approach to thinking and learning" (Walters 2018: 236). Even if Hemingway and Zieliński, caught up as they were in the zeitgeist, would have rejected this interpretation, it is a welcome afterthought to their short-lived but heartwarming friendship.

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