

subversion and also recycling of traditional generic parameters are listed as recurrent strategies deployed by post-classical romantic comedy in an attempt to reshape its aesthetics as well as its political agenda, mechanisms that are made visible and brilliantly theorised in the analyses of individual films.

The impact of the various formal and ideological elements sketched in the book upon the dynamics of what is considered a staple Hollywood genre remains to be further tested through the study of a wider range of contemporary romantic comedies. Nevertheless, *Terms of Endearment* surely constitutes a remarkable reference source within the fields of genre theory, cultural and film studies insofar as it succeeds in mapping the new territories conquered by romantic comedy in a most thorough but at the same time accessible way. The book offers us a glimpse not only of what romantic comedy is today but of what it may become in the future and, in my view, it stands both as a most elucidating and provocative reading for film scholars, and as a truly pleasant discovery for less specialized readers, who are bound to enjoy it just as much.

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Thomas Hermann
"Quite a Little about Painters":
Art and Artists in Hemingway's Life and Work
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The present volume, Thomas Hermann's contribution to the reassessment of Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), provides the reader with a new-generation approach to a classic whose personality and work have not ceased to attract critical attention since the 1920s. In 1999, when we celebrate the first centennial of Hemingway's birth, a powerful body of scholarly criticism exercised on the Hemingway text seems somehow exhausted. Still, its sweet

and sour fruits cannot be disregarded. The very forces that contributed for decades to the building up of both Hemingway's icon image and work as core to the American culture and, more specifically, to its literary canon, have also constructed for the nineties' reader a stereotype of the man and his work. We have learned to read him as the author who lends a voice to macho figures like the white hunter, the bullfighter, the gangster, the boxer, the heavy drinking artist, the soldier. This we already know of Hemingway and this knowledge becomes a hermeneutic monolith whose uncontested orthodoxy has rendered feminist and crosscultural readings of the Hemingway text deviant in as far as they consistently strive to make visible the dark side of Hemingway's moon: his fictional women, his Indians, his immigrants, in brief the different types of borderline characters that populate his fiction. After Scholes and Spilka in the 80s, critics have become increasingly sensitive to aspects in Hemingway's textual practice which result from the so called "linguistic turn", in other words, the new critical awareness of language use, context and the social constitution of the text as discourse. The social construction of reality and/or the entire dimensionality of its textual politics of gender, class, ethnicity, and identity must perforce bear both on the constitution of the reading/writing act and on the subject/object of this act as either central or marginal to a culture. All of them are factors that would have been considered residual if not totally external to the text if analysed within a formalist paradigm. As a result, the first wave of criticism exercised on Hemingway's textuality has tended to disregard the fact that Hemingway's fiction, in spite of its unquestionable aestheticism, is also political; it is about exile, about crosscultural contact both as a result of immigration and also of emigration, about alienation as a byproduct of the USA becoming an industrial empire, about the sacrifice of the native American (Indian) element, about the exploiting/exploited dimensions of the different European immigration waves and about the use of the American soldier in wars abroad. Conflict and the role of violence is an explicit theme of Hemingway's which cannot be overlooked in early as well as late texts and what surprises the reader of the nineties is the stubborn negative on the part of the mainly WASP scholar and critic to acknowledge any obscure zone around and within the Hemingway text. A zone that remains dangerous in its provocativeness and waits to be accommodated in a politically engaged reading which renders visible those discursive aspects of the text which have not been dealt with and which would let us understand better why this American Icon chose European and Cuban exile and still his writing remained so central to his own culture.

The novelty of Hermann's study does not consist so much in his interest in the sociopolitical dimension of Hemingway's narratives as in his detailed account of the aesthetic results brought upon the text by Hemingway's contact with other artists, especially painters, during the years of his European and Cuban exile. Hermann is also concerned that the Hemingway text includes both his published and unpublished material, and that especially the latter, is beyond the conceptualizations generated by previous critics and opens up naturally to a new generation of scholarly criticism like his which can read novelty and regeneration where the older school, faced with Hemingway's newly accessed writings, could only read degeneration. It is not difficult to see why: accommodating Hemingway's written materials, the published as well as the unpublished, is easier from within a postmodernist frame of criticism than from a modernist one, if only because of a more extended temporal perspective. A text like Hemingway's, whose production expanded over four decades (1920-1960), need have undergone significant alterations explainable on the basis of a changed world and a changed authorial identity even if the case had been another and the text had relied much less than it did on the actual conditions of life at the author's time. New readings of Hemingway's text must acknowledge the point no matter if Hemingway's position within the high altar of modernism becomes questionable by mere statement of his progression towards postmodernism.

The achievement of Thomas Hermann's *Quite a Little about Painters* does not only lie in the exhaustiveness and inclusiveness of its analysis, which contemplates Hemingway's early and late writings, both published and unpublished. What is more relevant to his readers is Hermann's explanation of the essential differences of style operating behind the recurrence of apparently similar motifs all along Hemingway's career. Hermann's work pays particular attention to a characteristic feature of Hemingway's narrative which has been let to pass unnoticed: and this is that Hemingway's narrative was always "quite a little about painters". Regarding this point, Hermann is careful to stress the fact that the fictional and historical painters appearing in the Hemingway narrative function as counterpoints for different kinds of writers, and also as analogues which allow Hemingway to dissect the basic similarities between different forms of the same endeavour, call it art or the artistic métier.

In defending that Hemingway's writing is about art, and more specifically, about how verbal art is made permanent in writing and about how these aesthetic processes are not totally different from those ordering the compositions of visual art (especially painting, which makes permanent what is not so, compare painting and the impermanent art of bullfighting),

Hermann is focusing on the consciously self-reflexive nature of Hemingway's own art, a highly stylized kind of writing. Hermann infers from the overwhelming presence of painters in Hemingway's narratives the need to reconstruct an undergoing process of intensification leading from Hemingway's initial fixation with the theme of art into a specular design incorporating specularly as a fundamental source of textual meaning. The progressive intensification of the self-reflexive nature of Hemingway's text grows from an initial interest of his art in art and progresses into an overall pattern of complex *mise-en-abymes*. This is contemplated by Thomas Hermann as indicative of a progression in Hemingway's style from the initial modernism of *In Our time* (1925) into the proto-postmodernism of *The Garden of Eden*, a narrative written in 1946 but published, only partially, as recently as 1986.

Hermann's exhaustive research of the different moments and shapes in which painters, factual and fictional, appear in the Hemingway text is thoroughly convincing. There are also weaker moments derived from a certain degree of repetitiveness caused by the author's thoroughness as well as by the way in which his book is organized into chapters. In any case, Hermann knows his painters as well as he knows his writer and reading him is enlightening because his is a thoughtful piece of honest work which relies on a great deal of previous research.

The influence of Max Nänny can be traced back, especially along those paragraphs devoted to the characteristic style of Hemingway's prose. But Hermann is only tangentially interested in Hemingway's language and in style *per se*. The same independence characterizes the author's abundant use of biographical material, which Hermann subjects to the scope of his own work thus avoiding the confusion between life and work threatening those who acknowledge the significant role of context to text but still lack the expertise to relate them otherwise than by abusive simplification.

In conclusion, "*Quite a Little about Painters*": *Art and Artists in Hemingway's Life and Work* is necessary reading to specialists who seek systematic coverage of a specific motif whose pervasiveness within Hemingway's narrative Hermann tackles through sheer sound thoroughness. Still, "*Quite a Little about Painters*" also addresses a more general kind of readership and, of course, students of literature interested in the decades between 1920 and 1960, which have proved central to the literary and cultural definition of the twentieth century.

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