

## Book Reviews

Edward F. Stanton. *Hemingway and Spain: A Pursuit*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989. pp. xvii, 258. \$27.00.

... the American imagination demands the real thing and, to attain it, must fabricate the absolute fake; where the boundaries between game and illusion are blurred, the art museum is contaminated by the freak show, and falsehood is enjoyed in a situation of "fulness," of *horror vacui*.

— UMBERTO ECO, *Travels in Hyperreality*

The first signs begin showing up a few hundred miles from Lexington. You see them at places like Campbellsburg on Route 421 or south on Route 127 near Kidds Store. They are huge flat figures of a man in dungarees or sometimes waders and a vest. He wears a bandolier slung over his shoulder or carries a rod and creel. Often the figure holds, upwards above its head and pointing down, a *bota* or Spanish winebag. Once or twice, near Mays Lick on Route 68 for example, you might see this figure wearing the plain leather *vaquero* costume that matadors wear when, the *traje de luces* set aside, they fight for charity. The figure is always big, much larger than life, always solid, handsome, mustachioed or bearded, competent, accomplished — clearly a man's man. The words beneath the figures identify them as Ernest, or Ernesto, or Hem, and the signs urge you to visit the Hemingway Museum in Lexington, Edward F. Stanton Prop. Once inside, you are treated to images of Ernest Hemingway at war and peace, speaking Spanish, watching bullfights, hunting and fishing, always eating and drinking. There are many images of him writing. He writes well: crisply, neatly, with a wonderful sense of natural rhythm, and an almost-native understanding of colloquial Spanish. He was simply amazing in so many ways. And he has become a "legend, an international password" (xi). A plaque that you see shortly after entering proclaims that "He was one of our greatest writers and also our greatest tourist" (6). You are now wandering among the displays and dioramas of the Stanton Hemingway Museum at the University of Kentucky in Lexington. Good luck to you.

The subtitle of *Hemingway and Spain: A Pursuit* bears a double message. Hemingway pursued Spain, seeking to understand both its language and its culture, probing its dark corners and obscure niches for "secret things," things that had disappeared from most parts of the world but might still be found in that "country shaped like a bull's hide on the western edge of the Old World" (xvii). On the other hand Professor Stanton has pursued Hemingway, seeking "secret things" in his life, trying always to discover the precise threads and knots that bound him so profoundly, and intimately, to Spain. He has pursued Hemingway through his writings about Spain and through his correspondence, but he has also traced his steps in Spain itself. He has walked in the same mountains, drunk in the same wineplaces, and talked to Spaniards who had known Hem. (Five of the ten photographs in the book show people with whom Stanton spoke in Spain. Only one, of the matador Antonio Ordóñez in a hospital bed after receiving a goring, shows Hemingway.) Stanton shows throughout an unmistakable devotion to his subject, an admirable quality for any biographical pursuit, but he slips again and again into an awe-struck, at times nearly slavish, fan-agog tone of unscholarly hype. Hemingway emerges from Stanton's discussion as simply too grand, too accomplished: a great writer, an innovative creator of a new style, a gargantuan ingestor of fresh experience, a triumphant master of Spanish language and culture and, remarkably, "our greatest tourist." The tone captures strikingly the excesses of American hyperreality in which simulacra, in bold outlines and primary colours, claim their validity through their own excessive recreation of the reality they claim to represent. Stanton's pursuit recalls, in this respect at least, the curatorial ambitions behind the succession of American museums, bizarrely specialized and outrageous, that Eco discovered, all proclaiming, in their "frantic desire for the Almost Real" (30), their exclusivity. The museum of Hemingway's Spanish memorabilia displays, in Eco's phrase, an "incontinent collectionism" (22).

*Hemingway and Spain* traces Hemingway's association with Spain from his first visit in 1921, when as a passenger aboard the S.S. *Leopoldina* he briefly visited Vigo, to the "dangerous summer" of 1959 when he followed Ordóñez's fortunes through a long series of *corridos*. (The bullfight journalism that Hemingway wrote in 1959 appeared as a three-part article in *Life* in 1960 and then, posthumously, as an expanded book in 1985. Whatever its value, either as literature or journalism, and Stanton expresses uncharacteristic reservations, it marks the final point of Hemingway's Spanish pursuit.) The book's method is straightforward. Stanton explores Hemingway's Spanish experience through the analysis of his three most important works, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). A coda deals with the ambiguous

“dangerous summer” journalism. In each case, Stanton provides the biographical account of Hemingway’s experience as it is manifested in a particular work. For example, he argues that Hemingway’s early experiences in Navarre, both fishing in the high country and joining Pamplona’s San Fermin festivities, which include the public running of bulls through the streets, manifest themselves in *The Sun Also Rises*. He then combines the account with critical commentary, much of which focuses upon questions of style. Stanton assumes a normal philological position in finding elements of style correlated to biographical data. He accepts Philip Young’s reductive analysis of Hemingway’s style as “an expression of [his] need to check and control the memories of his traumatic wounding in World War I” (33). Young’s analysis is extended to develop a correlation between the rhythms of the bullfight and the “ecstatic” prose style that Hemingway developed for the description of the action of the *corrida*:

The ecstatic prose always recreates a physical, rhythmic action in the present: it is a release from the past and memory, and exaltation of the moment. . . . None of these experiences [cited in the text] is “properly describable” — a great faena in a bullfight, fishing, hunting, skiing, lovemaking. Yet Hemingway’s ecstatic prose came as close as any other writer’s language to remaking these pure “pleasurable physical” sensations. (34, 40)

The notion that a literary style, Hemingway’s or someone else’s, reflects the writer’s actual lifeworld experiences, or that it can “remake” these experiences, linguistic features standing in for aspects of lived events, seems untenably simplistic. However, reductiveness probably goes hand-in-hand with the curatorial desire to have all the displays plainly identified and hammered into place. Everything, locked up and unmistakable, is described in stark, unequivocal assertions.

In addition to the straightforward retellings of Hemingway’s books, Stanton intersperses travelogue accounts of his own adventures in tracking his subject’s steps through Spain. These passages, reflecting in a very personal manner the second sense of the book’s subtitle, are in some respects Stanton’s most interesting writing. They have little to do with Hemingway other than to reveal, yet again, how facile and easily imitable, his prose style seems. (Writing like Hemingway, as literary movements such as neo-minimalism and dirty realism ubiquitously demonstrate, requires little more gumption than wearing Sally Ann cast-offs. Writing *well* like Hemingway poses, it may be, a different problem.) They do reveal, however, both the intensity and the sincerity of Stanton’s curatorial desire. Consider the following account of and important discovery that he makes in the course of a hike in the company of a peasant guide through the Sierra de Guadarrama. They have been climbing near where the battle took place on 31 May 1937, upon which Hemingway modelled the central action of *For*

*Whom the Bell Tolls*. Stanton wants to find the cave in which the guerrilla band of Pilar and Pablo lived, and where Robert Jordan met Maria.

You look around for the large opening in the rock that you have imagined, but there is none. The old man is pointing to a small granite ledge at the base of a hill, only large enough for one or two men to crouch in.

"But *viejo*, I am looking for a cave with space for people to live and sleep and cook in."

"Nay, there is no such cave in these mountains, not now nor never."

You know he is telling the truth. Hem invented Pablo's cave for the *Bell* the way he invented so many other things in his life and in his books. You can't work too close to the world. The only writing that is any good is what you invent, what you imagine. That makes everything round and whole and solid, he said. Don't describe it, create it, make it.

You laugh at yourself, taking the wineskin off your shoulder. You unscrew the tit and offer it to him.

"Many thanks," he says, lifting the bota to let the wine spurt into the back of his mouth. (143)

One might feel compassion (amused or empathetic) for a critic who must hike in the mountains to learn that a writer can invent details, and that a fictional cave or steel bridge may be, in "reality," much less imposing. One wonders why, a professor of literature, he could not have learned some lessons, clarifying his interpretive hypotheses in advance, from the history of literature. Nonetheless, the deep personal desire to get things straight, to pin them down, is engaging. More uncertain are Stanton's attempts to imitate Hemingway's style: the second-person present tense sentences, the pseudo-Spanish phrases and the simple, compound structures, are all likely to bother the reader, urging the simplicities of Hemingway's style too directly, even while actually capturing some of the spirit Stanton seeks.

There are a few interesting discussions in *Hemingway and Spain*, particularly with regard to Hemingway's understanding of Spanish (very good, but not so good as he himself believed) and his knowledge of the history and conventions of bullfighting (extensive, though he was always too sympathetic to the matador). However, there is far too much curatorial hype and far too many assertions that, however eye-catching in their primary colours, transmit little meaningful information. Stanton's inane reflections on the aesthetic quality of bull's blood, for instance, should infuriate both those who care for animals and those who care for aesthetic judgements: "... far from being repulsive, the blood may even have an esthetic quality for the aficionado as it flows and gleams in the sunlight, the bright red against the black of the bull's hide" (102). He frequently misappropriates the names of thinkers in order to enhance his subject. Thus the Spanish philosopher, Miguel de Unamuno, is compelled to lend his sophisticated, proto-existentialist idea of the "tragic sense of life" to Stanton's

enterprise merely to provide a convenient metaphor for what Stanton takes to be the Spanish obsession with death. C. G. Jung is cited several times to clarify what is said to be an unconscious, archetypal level in Hemingway's creativity. Stanton argues, following Jung, that Hemingway "fused the qualities of both the psychological and the visionary artist: the conscious world of clarity, discipline, and order in this terse manner, and the unconscious realm of numinous emotion and mystery in his ecstatic prose. . . . [His] real stylistic innovation was the fusion of these two modes in a unique, flexible, powerful synthesis" (35). There is, it would seem, a double argument: Stanton's Hemingway was both an unconscious artist, of the kind that Jung typically privileges, *and* a fully conscious artist who carefully shapes his sentences, in the manner of the bullfighter *templando* his passes to fit the bull's body and motion to the actual contours of actions. In the hyperreality of the Hemingway Museum, conflicting messages, both vague and contradictory, fill the air. In all that wind, you'll need to hold on to your hat. And cast a cold eye on the documentation.

The two weakest aspects of *Hemingway and Spain* are Stanton's uncritical enthusiasm for *all* of Hemingway's masculine posturing, even the most shallow *machismo*, and his inability to examine closely what it might mean to be a great (much less the "greatest") tourist. From a distance, perhaps more conceptual than simply temporal, Hemingway's insistence upon the codes of male behaviour, the gestures and ceremonies of masculinity, seem unenlightened, outdated, even perverse. Stanton buys into this baggage unreflectively. "The bullring," he writes, beginning one of his personal excursions, "is pulsating with music and man-voices" (67). Imitating, as always, Hemingway's obsessions, he watches the matador Luis Francisco Esplá dress for a fight and he thinks of it as a ritual, rather like his sister dressing for her wedding, but something purely male: "This is a masculine ritual" (44). Hemingway's quest to find in bullfighters, such as Villalta or Maera, the "heroic model and [the] touchstone of masculine conduct" (53) that he attempts to locate in Pedro Romero, the young bullfighter in *The Sun Also Rises*, prances like a pathetic chimera, long in the tooth, hide ulcerated, purblind. The model of male life repetitively emphasizes testicularity and all, in Hemingway's grotesque reprise of male conduct, that this can symbolize. Stanton approvingly cites the narrator of *Death in the Afternoon*: "it 'takes more *cojones*' to be a sportsman when death is part of the game" (103). Testicles, as in the bullfighter's admired *cojones*, symbolize courage, honour, fortitude, and everything else that Hemingway thought belonged to the masculine code (as if there were only one.) Stanton even suggests that Goya, whom Hemingway admired greatly, painted from "all the senses," including his *cojones* (118). The synecdoche, so brutally reductive, requires that everything a man

might do be judged against the standard of a few fairly limited kinds of action (of which, in Hemingway's view, the bullfight constitutes the archetype) involving bodily performance, danger, pain, and the threat of death. It is hard to see why Stanton, writing as a scholar, accepts this shallow view of masculinity so wholeheartedly, though it is easy enough to see why the curator of the Hemingway Museum might do so.

The notion that Hemingway was the "greatest tourist" demands some final comment. Hemingway's associations with Spain were certainly intense and, in some respects, quite deep. They were neither widely extended nor thoroughgoing. His preoccupations (which he did not discover in Spain) with a narrow range of male activities limited his view of the country. He shows no interest in the lives of women. He cares little for family life. Farmers and workers do not really interest him, other than in their recreational activities or in their coarser turns of phrase, and he pays little attention to the sheer dailiness, either in detail or pattern, of ordinary life. He simply does not observe Spain, or any other country, as a "great" tourist (D. H. Lawrence, say) might do. Stanton remarks that Hemingway's description of Aranjuez in *Death in the Afternoon* ignores the "royal palaces and gardens," and rather "penetrates directly into the actual, present life of the town." That "present life," however, consists of "succulent strawberries and thumb-thick asparagus," grilled chickens and Valdepeñas wine offset by a number of "cripples and beggars who follow the ferias throughout the peninsula" (106). The absurdity of considering this highly accented spume upon the flow of existence (again, the bold outlines and vivid colours) as "present life" underscores both the hollowness of Hemingway's tourism and the Museum's official view. To know Spain, Stanton writes, summing up Hemingway's considered view,

one must use all the senses, the cojones and the whole body as well as the mind: one must immerse himself in the life of the fiesta, imbibe the wine of the country, eat the abundant fruits of the earth and seas, exhaust the night, love women, participate in the ritual sacrifice of the bullring beneath the sun in the high cloudless skies. (109)

Man-voice to man-voice, this is advice to men, and then only to certain men, and then only to advise them how to spend a holiday or their R and R from life's on-goingness, and then only to promote the moment's happiness. One would like more from a great tourist. One might expect to hear the resonances of the nation's literature, or its historical depth, and to feel the awareness of historically grounded political issues. (Hemingway's critique of Communist party practices in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, for example, does not reach far beyond a shallow lampoon of personalities. He seems to have been, Stanton admits, "blissfully unaware of the political and economic

conditions of the country" [15].) A great tourist, the greatest it is claimed, should know about these things, unsecret as they are. One would have wanted from Hemingway some of the penetration and range that Lawrence, like *all* great travellers, brought to the places where he chose to live.

Now you have seen the Hemingway Museum. You have peered at the dioramas and muttered through the documentation at each display. Now it is time to buy a tee shirt or two. You can buy a plastic coffee mug with Hem's face on it. There are pot-metal models of the steel bridge and the cave in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. You can buy them too. But don't buy those bumper stickers that read, "It will be a long time, if ever, before there is born / An American so strong, so rich in adventure" (212). Those lines are crudely lifted, warped, and diminished from the final stanza of García Lorca's elegy for a great bullfighter. His wonderful "Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías" deserves a better fate. In *Death in the Afternoon* Hemingway makes it clear that he despises Sánchez Mejías. Even in the multiplicitous space of American hyperreality the rawness of the irony jolts one's mind. Don't you dare buy that bumper sticker.

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Two novels about great nineteenth-century travellers to what Europeans considered to be the ends of the earth: *Whales* concerning an English hireling of Henry Stanley while in quest of David Livingstone in equatorial Africa; *Slowness* concerning John Franklin at the extremes of the globe, both Australia and the Arctic. Both books are translated, the former from Swedish and the latter from German; both are intensely personal views of men seduced to journey into their unknown by forces they think they understand but which prove totally inadequate to explain what becomes their continued, tortured quest.