

wider panorama and recognize in it the familiar pattern of a Jew interposing in her way to a desirable marriage:

Dr von Heber had been saved. The fascinating eyes and snorting smile had saved him; coming out of space to tell him she was a flirt. 'She adore me; hah! I tell you she adore me,' he would say. It was history repeating itself. Max and Ted. Again after all these years. A Jew. (Richardson, *Interim* 434)

Moreover, Mr Mendizabal's influence on Miriam flaws the "womanly woman" role she is rehearsing in Dr von Heber's presence:

She turned the pages of her note-book and came upon the scrap crossed through by Mr Mendizabal. She read the words through, forcing them to accept a superficial meaning. Disturbance about ideas would destroy the perfect serenity that was demanded of her." (Richardson, *Interim* 390)

Bluemel maintains that *Pilgrimage* "fails to resolve the questions it has prominently placed center stage. Dimple Hill and March Moonlight, the two 'endings' of the novel, leave readers wondering what the 'real' conclusion to *Pilgrimage* may be" (1997: 121). She offers an account of the biographical, feminist and other explanations that have been given for *Pilgrimage's* lack of an ending. This preoccupation about the apparent absence of a Grail that would bring the novel together can be related to the fact that despite modernism's parodical fragmentation of classical realism, the canonical modernist work of art still strives for the idea of wholeness inherent in its autonomy and introspection, because there is no fragmentation without the idea of integrity (Eagleton: 1997). Thus, it could be said that *Pilgrimage* is more modernist in its openness than other canonical modernist works of art in their closeness.

Bluemel reads *Pilgrimage* in terms of Richardson's alternate literary forms in order to reframe the problem of endings and of the body. The body struggling with death is seen by her as Richardson's illustration of the impossibility of narrative endings. Bluemel argues that Richardson's other writings, including articles in dental and political magazines and short fiction, encourage the reader to break conventional ways of reading in terms of beginnings, middles and ends. She explores Richardson's short fiction paying special attention to the thematic treatment of endings and the limitations stream of consciousness imposes on her representations of death. Thus she contends that *Pilgrimage* will continue to elude closure, holding

that "*Pilgrimage's* perverse refusal to provide any sense of an ending" is one of its most radical experiments that differentiate it from the rest of modernist fiction.

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Peter William Evans and Celestino Deleyto, eds.
*Terms of Endearment:
 Hollywood Romantic Comedy of the 1980s and 1990s*
 Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998.

Dismissed too hastily by critics like Brian Henderson as a genre on the verge of extinction in the late 1970s, Hollywood romantic comedy has nonetheless proved to be in quite good health throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In an attempt to retain its popularity and appeal for contemporary audiences, at a time when the genre's traditional commitment to the open celebration of heterosexual love and marriage can no longer be unproblematically validated, romantic comedy seems to have initiated once again a process of rearticulation of its narrative and representational strategies, which attests to the flexibility and resilience of what has been regarded as an apparently rigid, fixed set of conventions. Drawing on this idea, the essays gathered in *Terms of Endearment*, edited by Peter William Evans and Celestino Deleyto in

1998, provide the readers with an engaging and highly readable overview of the various ways in which romantic comedy has strived to alter both its formal and ideological boundaries without entirely abandoning its original generic standpoints.

In his essay "Love Lies: Romantic Fabrication in Contemporary Romantic Comedy," Frank Krutnik outlines the two main tendencies or directions followed by the genre from the late 1970s into the 1990s: His analysis focuses on *Annie Hall* (1977) and *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), which are taken respectively as significant representatives of the cycles of films labelled *nervous romances* and *new romances*. It shows how romantic comedy has recently oscillated from a rather deep scepticism about the validity of traditional love ideals in modern times to a more optimistic, self-conscious acceptance of the fabricated nature of such ideals. Acceptance that may restore, if only in part, faith in romance, love and coupledness as safe avenues towards self-fulfilment and happiness.

Krutnik's accurate categorization of the genre's reactions to the profound changes which began to affect US intimate culture in the 1960s and 1970s, and which resulted in new perceptions of love, sexuality, coupledness and marriage, constitutes a valuable theoretical framework for any future research on the history of Hollywood romantic comedy and its current developments. It is also a most appropriate point of departure for the other nine contributions in the book, which embark on a closer scrutiny of the specific strategies used to widen the genre's scope. The essays assembled in *Terms of Endearment* are integrated within a shared discourse firmly grounded on a productive, eclectic combination of cultural and historical perspectives, genre theory and feminist and psychoanalytical insights. A discourse which, through the analysis of a series of individual films—including *Victor/Victoria*, *Murphy's Romance*, *Something Wild*, *Peggy Sue Got Married*, *Working Girl*, *Alice*, *Jungle Fever*, *Gas Food Lodging* and a number of 80s and 90s comedies starring Meg Ryan—seeks to cover a single common issue: the ongoing process of redefinition undergone by Hollywood romantic comedy in the 1980s and 1990s.

Post-classical romantic comedy, these contributions argue, has begun to explore issues scarcely tackled by former comedies as a central strategy to persuade contemporary audiences to cling again to romantic ideals, thus preserving the essential ideological project of the genre. Often criticised for a lack of concern with marginal social realities and a reluctance to engage in social critique, Hollywood romantic comedy has increasingly strived, in more or less successful ways, to make room for controversial topics, which, as reflected in this book, range from the problematization of the notion of

gender and the definition of gender roles (Steven Cohan, Deborah Thomas), the articulation of less reductive views of female subjectivity (Chantal Cornut-Gentile, Celestino Deleyto and Kathleen Rowe) to a scrutiny of black experience (Isabel Santaolalla) or an apparent preoccupation with social, sexual and ethnic difference (Constanza del Río). In these essays, as well as in those devoted to the significant connections between stars and the ideological dimension of the new romances (Bruce Babington, Peter Evans), contemporary romantic comedy is described as a genre hesitatingly constructing a less codified view of socio-cultural conditions and of subjectivity itself. Agenda that, sometimes, heads for promising new perspectives, particularly on the construction of gender identity and the definition of sex roles, as Cohan, Thomas, Deleyto and Rowe conclude in their respective analyses of *Victor/Victoria*, *Murphy's Romance*, *Alice* and *Gas Food Lodging*. Problematizing, to a greater or lesser extent, the conventional prescriptions of the genre, these films are said to have opened up a space for queer experience and women's issues by largely dislocating traditional dominant assumptions on the dichotomy gender/sex (Cohan), and on female roles and the distribution of power between the sexes (Thomas, Deleyto, Rowe).

Despite such progressive vocation, nevertheless, contemporary romantic comedy does not always fulfil the expectations apparently raised at the beginning of the films. In her study of *Working Girl*, Cornut-Gentile shows how the narrative, in spite of its overt refusal to define female experience as inextricably linked to home and the family, manages to compromise the female protagonist's empowerment in the public arena by eventually subordinating it to the "authority" of the male romantic lead as a kind of prerequisite for the final union of the couple. Similarly, del Río and Santaolalla, in their respective essays on *Something Wild* and *Jungle Fever*, argue that the potential interest of these films in social, sexual and racial margins and, in the case of Spike Lee's production, in interracial relationships, is displaced from central stage to focus instead on that traditional motif most congenial to comedy: the formation or reconstruction of the heterosexual couple, thus largely undermining the more radical gender politics initially endorsed by the narratives.

Just as the book examines the ideology informing the films in the light of the historical, socio-economic, cultural backgrounds which surrounded their production, it also draws the readers' attention to the significance of formal experimentation within the current transformations experienced by Hollywood romantic comedy. The use of postmodern generic hybridity, a self-conscious exploitation of star meanings, together with an unapologetic

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
Tübingen; Basel: Francke, 1997.
ISBN 3 7720 2435 1
240 pp.

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.