REVIEWS
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Nancy R. Comley and Robert Scholes,
Hemingway's Genders:
Rereading the Hemingway Text.
New Haven: Yale UP, 1994. 153 p.

In the *TLS* September 1, 1995 issue, David Van Lear reviews *Hemingway's Genders* in what I consider a remarkable piece of misunderstanding of Comley and Scholes' book. Comley and Scholes are neither apologizing for "Hemingway's resentment of feminist discourse" nor writing his eulogy nor trying to relocate Hemingway's genders within a well-lighted place. They are not making a statement in support of a recuperation of Hemingway either. Rather, they are offering a holistic reading of Hemingway's texts. Theirs is a reading based on the assumption that these texts contribute to the formation of a higher textual unit in which the issue of gender becomes a prominent feature.

As I see it, this one and only text resulting from Comley and Scholes' critical reading is intertextual in nature. If something is to be criticised, surely it is not the intertextual quality of their reading, which I believe to be an asset. I object, rather, to their not acknowledging the fact. Comley and Scholes' lack of acknowledgement of the critical concept of intertextuality affects their method of analysis negatively because it leaves part of their methodology unspecified. Scholes, a respected critic, is considered to be a semiotician as well as a structuralist. His structural bend is a bit overbearing,

especially as it results in the abundant, if not abusive, use of the idea of code within *Hemingway's Genders*.

The outcome of a semiostructural as well as intertextual reading of Hemingway's works is bound to be abstract. At least, Comley and Scholes' reading of Hemingway's stories as different encodings of one and the same matrix implies that the text is readable on two different levels. The underlying, abstract code is produced by a deep reading and realised under different guises or a discreet number of textual variants at surface level. In such a structural reading mothers, nurses, bitches, girls and lesbian devils are comparable and reducible to a single pattern or matrix integrating all their features. So it happens with fathers, doctors, boys, "maricones," bullfighters, soldiers and boxers. The parallel roles assigned to the male and female characters seems to render these roles comparable. Now, how do Comley and Scholes read the differences versus the similarities found between males and females? The authors' explanation does not account for the different weight the voices of women and men bear within the text. Hemingway's texts dramatize the conflict between the sexes by means of a highly stylized and complex use of language on the part of the characters and narrator. The analytical method used by the authors is not flexible enough to tackle this pragmatic issue; since it leaves out contextual and ideological factors which could contribute to a sounder understanding of why and what for did Hemingway design his characters the way he did. They admit,

> Our critical method is directed not at the aesthetic dimension of Hemingway's work- neither his prose style nor the shape of his stories, admirable though these are - but at the ethical dimension. That is, we are concerned with the representation of human character in Hemingway's writing, especially with how characters are constructed along lines of gender and sexual behaviour. (Comley and Scholes 1994: xi)

There is a certain amount of self-contradiction behind this statement. How can Comley and Scholes be concerned with the representation of human character in writing and with how characters are constructed if they disregard the architecture, or discursive texture, of Hemingway's prose? Can the ethical and aesthetical dimensions of a literary text be treated in isolation? These are theoretical questions about the nature of the literary text. Depending on what answer we give them we will be more or less satisfied with the result of

Comley and Scholes' work. Personally I have read it with some interest which I know derives mainly from the fact that I admire Hemingway's literature.

It is a conceited misunderstanding that makes Van Lear affirm that "While Hemingway is interested in gender, he is not interesting on gender." An unbiassed revision of Hemingway's stories, for instance, will render Van Lear's presumption groundless. It is probably his reading that "only underscores the work's faith in white male entitlement." As a woman I read "Hills like White Elephants," "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," "Cat in the Rain," or "Up in Michigan," among others, and I can hear the silenced women who need not be empowered by their or anyone else's discourse, women whose mere presence suffices. Their truth is heard, indirectly spoken but radically affirmed by Hemingway's text if not by Hemingway, himself or his narrators. Whose voice should we privilege when we read Hemingway's novels and short stories? Wouldn't it be better to acknowledge all, and welcome the polyphony of voices within which the reader's voice is inscribed?

Van Lear says Hemingway is not interesting on gender but writers are interesting if they succeed at involving their readers in the possible worlds they model textually. Does it make sense to ask of interesting writers to be interesting on something? Their texts are rich enough, readers provide their own feminist or masculinist interpretations of Hemingway's texts according to their interests and ideological horizon. Comley and Scholes insist that Hemingway's men exhibit to a greater or lesser extent characteristics which in our western culture used to be considered feminine and viceversa, some of his women exhibit characteristics traditionally viewed as masculine. In Hemingway's texts these fictional men and women form a continuum rather than a bipolarity. How do Comley and Scholes interpret this fact? They just do not interpret it, but leave this task to others —which leaves us wondering where is the ethical dimension of their reading.

In spite of all its weaknesses, *Hemingway's Genders* succeeds in "making it difficult to think of Hemingway as a writer with too much machismo for his own good" (Comley and Scholes, 1994: 146) and this is positive because it helps Hemingway's readers to get rid of stereotypes that burden the image of the writer and his texts; an image that takes time to erase once it has been formed because it lingers entrenched, as in Van Lear's apparently innocuous review, where it would be less expected.a

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