

Art Matters: Hemingway, Craft, and the Creation of the Modern Short Story.
By Robert Paul Lamb. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010.
273 pp. Cloth \$45.00.

About two years ago I decided to reread Carl Eby's *Hemingway's Fetishism* and now am reduced to continually renewing my university library copy, since it is marked by multiple Post-it Note tabs indicating passages I wish to go back to consult. If anything, my review copy of *Art Matters* is even more marked. There is much of interest to me in it.

It is a little difficult to categorize Lamb's book precisely. On one hand, it works to establish an enhanced vocabulary and method for discussing short fiction. On the other, it is a detailed historical and critical examination of Hemingway's place in the development of the modern short story, and his role in shaping that development. The two elements are very much intertwined, though with the detailed examination of Hemingway's role predominating, this being the element that apparently prompted Lamb's original interest and formed much of his analytic scheme for short fiction.

In its first role, establishing a new point of view for the study of short fiction, the book recalls previous theories of the short story from a to z, and also adds to the existing vocabulary of critical terms. Lamb coins about a dozen new terms. They are sometimes quite clear in meaning, sometimes a little whimsical. Among my favorites are the rather clear "Conradian split" [between narrator and subject, think Marlowe and Kurtz, also seen in *The Great Gatsby* with Nick and Gatsby], the more fanciful "disjunctive bump" [which in an ending reminds the reader of the arbitrary limits of the story as opposed to the open-ended nature of reality], and the "float-off" [ending], in which an author manages evocatively to move the reader beyond the arbitrary end point of a story into a possible future for the characters or a larger consideration of issues raised by the work.

Other new terms include "sequence displacement" [in which the chronological order of a story's events is altered to increase emotional impact], "implication omission" [in which the author does not explain connections that a sensitive reader can otherwise feel and understand], "tonal openings" [which Imagistically establish mood and theme], "present absence" [in which the author establishes a past reality and then makes the reader feel its absence in the story's present time], "rounded closed endings" [in which the

story's actions all are completed—think “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber”), “seeded closed endings” [which carry readers evocatively beyond the story's ending, perhaps to a view of landscape as in “Up in Michigan” or “The Battler”), “normative center” [a device from 19th century fiction establishing a past normal state as in the forest scene between Hester and Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter* contrasting with the present situation of the two], “illustrative stamp” [often an image that performs a similar purpose in a modern short story], and “recapitulation with variation” [in which a thing is presented multiple times via differing words].

Lamb also takes on and refines a number of existing terms, including most importantly expressionism and impressionism, which he finds central to understanding exactly how Hemingway perceives and portrays his world.

Perhaps needless to say, these definitions are worked out in much greater detail than I can suggest here and are extensively illustrated, with examples from Hemingway's work predominating, but not excluding examples from other authors. The detail of the discussion is such that this book is not easy reading on a certain level. Not that it is difficult to understand. Lamb is an award-winning teacher, and his skills show in the clarity of his explanations and illustrations. Rather, there is so much in the book that although I found myself originally expecting to breeze through it in an evening, I instead wound up reading it over a period of weeks, taking it one chapter at a time. I feel that I still am assimilating its insights and arguments into my own views of short fiction and of Hemingway's work.

In its second role, as an examination of Hemingway's importance to the development of the modern story, the book is most impressive, carefully grounding Hemingway's achievement in the theory and practice of his artistic predecessors, reporting the reactions of his contemporaries and literature successors to his work, and offering quite detailed and incisive readings of some of his exemplary short stories. The book is also concise and energetic. For instance, take this excerpt from Lamb's discussion of Hemingway's relationship to Henry James:

Henry James had complained about novels that were loose and baggy monsters; Hemingway dealt a death blow to the loose and baggy story. Each was a consummate craftsman in his own best genre, and if James is arguably atop any list for the title of “novelist's novelist,” then the same can be said, if we perhaps exclude Chekhov, for Hemingway in the short story. (226)

Beginning his exploration of Hemingway's importance, Lamb first punctures the stereotype of the author as an unthinking, macho figure, while explaining some of the factors leading to that early judgment by a generation of male critics, many of them veterans of WWII. He looks at subsequent revisions of Hemingway's reputation by female and other critics with new points of view that helped to reveal the complexity of the author's concerns and achievements). Lamb quotes extensively from writers and critics throughout the world and the modern movement to establish Hemingway's centrality as the one author who revolutionized prose style in the 20th century.

Viewing Hemingway's 19th century American predecessors, Lamb places Hemingway in the line of Edgar Allan Poe, aiming for unified effects (as opposed to the more discursive Hawthorne, whose authorial voice tends to comment more extensively—and sometimes humorously—upon his subject matter). Among 20th century authors in English singled out as particular influences is James Joyce. Lamb sees Joyce's art as more important to Hemingway's than might generally be assumed, although Joyce's epiphanies are not precisely reflected in Hemingway's work. Rather, Hemingway's aesthetics "embrace the Joycean epiphany—by seeing objects with such complete clarity and describing them so precisely that the reader sees them too, with no need for authorial comment" (168).

Throughout, Lamb buttresses his arguments with sensitive and extensive close reading of Hemingway stories. Again, this makes reading *Art Matters* an experience that is not difficult but that does require reader's full attention in following Lamb through the stories. To give an idea of the level of analysis, take the image of the train wreck seen by the travelers in "A Canary for One." Lamb shows the wreck working in at least six different ways, not only by indicating the actual physical wreck, but also by suggesting the wreck of the main character's marriage and the past process by which the marriage came to ruin, as well as the cluelessness of a fellow passenger who does not see the wrecks (of train or marriage), among other functions. This might be a little difficult for some undergraduates, but it is greatly of interest to academic critics or creative writers wanting to delve into Hemingway's methods. This book obviously had a long gestation and deserves considerable attention from those interested in the short story, its development, and especially in Hemingway's importance to the genre.

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