Robert Paul Lamb, *The Hemingway Short Story: A Study in Craft for Writers and Readers* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 233 pp.

The professional study of literature places demands on scholars that are not required of casual readers, who are free to read as quickly or inventively as they wish without any special obligation to the process. However, scholars are obligated to give each text a careful examination resulting in the rigorous formulation of intellectually verifiable propositions about literature. In the context of this critical assumption, Robert Paul Lamb's *The Hemingway Short Story* scores well as an exercise in basic close reading and rather poorly in many of its conclusions about themes and ideas, especially when given a biographical formulation. For the most part, the book is a welcome contribution to two important dimensions of American literary study, the ever-swelling library of investigations into Hemingway's fiction and the newly energized emphasis on the story as an important genre in American literature. Although Lamb's title suggests a wide-ranging consideration of the complete canon of Hemingway's short fiction, the book is actually a discussion of only five stories, each of them receiving both detailed analysis (generally perceptive and restrained) and broad thematic interpretation (often moving quite beyond available evidence). Lamb is at his best in working close to the text, in essentially an old-fashioned New Critical approach, including detailed considerations of the manuscripts, composition, and publication history of each work. However, Lamb's work could have benefitted from a more thorough examination of the previous criticism on Hemingway's short stories. For example, Lamb did not consult Jackson Benson's massive *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: Critical Essays*[1] nor Michael Reynolds' celebrated *Critical Essays on Ernest Hemingway's* In Our Time, a rich collection of scholarship presenting a spectrum of approaches to the vary stories under consideration.[2] Lamb has not adequately considered the implications of Philip Young's groundbreaking interpretation of "Big Two-Hearted River," particularly with regard to Nick Adams' war experiences and the therapeutic nature of ritualized activity that allows him, finally, to sleep.[3] Arthur Waldhorn's *A Reader's Guide to Ernest Hemingway* exhibits great respect for the Hemingway's text and admirable restraint in avoiding fanciful readings.[4] Paul Smith's *A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* is still the best study of the composition and publication history of the short fiction, and it includes virtually all of the information that Lamb offers on the background of the stories.[5] It also includes an insightful discussion of various interpretative approaches to each work. Milton A. Cohen's *Hemingway's Laboratory: The Paris* In Our Time also is an important guide to the composition history of the very stories Lamb considers.[6] For Hemingway's years in his hometown, *Hidden Hemingway: Inside the Ernest Hemingway Archives of Oak Park* would have provided Lamb with valuable information.[7]

The chapter on "Indian Camp" is illustrative of the strengths and weaknesses of Lamb's approach. In the center of his discussion, he offers an excellent close reading of the early section of the story, as Nick and his father are rowed across the lake to the camp with the pregnant woman who needs a Caesarian section to survive. Dr. Adams will perform the procedure with a skinning knife and sew her up with a gut leader, all performed without anesthesia. Nick watches the entire event, including the shocking conclusion when Dr. Adams discovers that the woman's husband has committed suicide by slitting his own throat. Lamb moves through all of this in great de-

1 Jackson Benson, ed., *The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway: Critical Essays* (Durham: Duke UP, 1975).

2 Michael Reynolds, ed., *Critical Essays on Ernest Hemingway's* In Our Time (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983).

3 Philip Young, *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1966).

4 Arthur Waldhorn, *A Reader's Guide to Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1972).

5 Paul Smith, *A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1989).

6 Milton A. Cohen, *Hemingway's Laboratory: The Paris* In Our Time (Tuscaloosa: UP, 2005).

7 Robert K. Elder, Aaron Vetchi, and Mark Civeno, *Hidden Hemingway: Inside the Ernest Hemingway Archives of Oak Park* (Kent: Kent State UP, 2016).

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tail, even resorting to a scansion of the lines as though they were poetry, showing how the rhythm of the language captures the activity of rowing the boat, for example.

However, Lamb's approach becomes problematic when he attempts to discover the biographical origins of the basic events of the story, and, without providing any evidence, decides, for example, that the screaming of the Indian woman derives from moments in Paris when Ernest and Hadley were ill and listened to young Bumby crying in his crib (9). The question arises why Lamb attempts to account for the themes in "Indian Camp" by speculating about Hemingway's European experiences in 1924, when the author had ample personal experiences in Michigan to inform his fiction and did not need to draw on his life in Paris. After all, Hemingway spent all of his youthful summers at Walloon Lake in Michigan in a cottage only a short walk from an Indian camp, and he played and fished with the children there regularly. His father, an obstetrician, often treated the nearby Indians, usually without compensation, and he shared his experiences with his family, including his oldest son. Hemingway had younger sisters and a brother, and there was no shortage of childhood screaming throughout the household.

Lamb offers a perceptive analysis of the original opening of the story, much later published as "Three Shots," and shows how it is artistically inferior to the rest of the story. He goes on to a strong examination of narrative point of view of "Indian Camp." But when he draws on Roland Barthes's notions of the "proairetic" and "hermeneutic" codes, it does not become clear what these concepts contribute to the analysis. In fact, Lamb's considerations of the "reader's consciousness" including a listing of what a reader must be thinking about beyond what the narrator has to offer (37), lead him away from the text.

The chapter on "Soldier's Home" shares many of the virtues and weaknesses of the opening section. Lamb is at times excellent in analyzing the story paying sensitive attention to structural organization and narrative method. At a few points he argues debatable points: for example, the narrator says that Krebs returned home from the war late, "years after the war was over," but Lamb contends that comment is "not literally true," that Krebs arrived home in 1919 (97). Although the discussion of the historical context of the postwar period is quite good, Lamb's statement that the young women in Oklahoma would not have bobbed their hair or worn silk stockings because in that area "reactionary social attitudes prevailed" (109) shows how little he seems to understand about the region and the power of magazines and newspapers in the 1920s. On the other hand, his basic reading of the story as portraying a young man in "painful transition," both cultural and psychological, is deftly argued and would apply to the Nick Adams stories as well as to "Soldier's Home."

"A Canary for One" is not one of Hemingway's most famous stories, but it presents some issues, such as an ending that gives all of the events another dimension of meaning, that reward close scrutiny and consideration. Lamb presents a strong reading of the details of the story with an emphasis on the implications of a shift to first person in the middle of the train trip to Paris. He is perceptive in pointing out that this story is unique in that the key decisions that face the central characters have already been made; the tension is derived from the protagonist's having to deal with the consequences. In a numbered analysis slowly going through the progression of events, he gives a perceptive description of technique and aesthetics. Turning to thematic matters, however, he once again founders on poor judgment. For example, when he sums up Hemingway's story by assuming that he knows the author's motives in writing it, that Hemingway does not care about the characters, especially not the husband's emotional state, but only about making the action "come alive" (119).

A further problem arises from Lamb's interpretation of the story's symbolism. He argues that the canary in the cage is a "symbol of the entrapment of the American lady's daughter and/or of the narrator and his wife in the compartment" (129). Since the 1890s, a bird in a cage has been used in American literature as a metaphor for the limitations society places on women, as in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. But he strains the term "symbol" when he claims that the American lady is a "symbol of domesticity" (135).

Lamb gives "God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen" an unconvincing reading beginning with his thesis that the story is "about the problems of reading a text and the consequences of misreading," a concept he calls a "semiotic confusion" resulting from the "failure of signifiers to point to appropriate signifieds" (155). He then adds that the story is about "critics" and how

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they read a text. Although Lamb's summary of the plot is reasonable enough, he reaches the implausible conclusion that Hemingway "clearly expects the reader to intuit that the old narrator is aware now […] of the difficulty of reading texts" (166).

Lamb concludes with a discussion of one of Hemingway's most important stories, the two sections of "Big Two-Hearted River," which has long been read as an account of a therapeutic excursion by a young Nick Adams home from World War I to the fishing grounds he knew before he left for duty in Italy. Although it is nowhere stated, the implications of the details are that he has seen traumatic events and is still attempting to establish some emotional stability. It is clear that he has had trouble sleeping at night, because much is made of his taking a nap. He is precise about how to stake a tent, put bait on a hook, and release a fish, and doing these things give him comfort and a sense of control.

Lamb's approach is to declare that the story is about "the writing of stories, including the writing of itself," a line of logic he attempts to support by examining the original conclusion that Hemingway discarded. In focusing on this version of the story, in which Nick and Bill Smith fish together, Lamb attributes to it a "homoerotic nature" of "male bonding" (174). Even less convincing is his interpretation of the trout in the stream as "metaphors for stories themselves" (174-75). Lamb's ultimate approach insists on this equation: "The rushing river is the writer's life; downstream it is his memory of the past, upstream the future, and where he stands the present. The trout are stories that he fishes for in his memory […]" (189).

Lamb's book is thus a mixed bag of insightful close readings and unfounded broad generalizations that pretend to disclose profound new levels of interpretation. Working close to the text, and no one has worked closer to these Hemingway stories, he is generally sensitive to the implications of language, images, and details drawn from actual life. In discussing the thematic significance of the stories, however, he makes claims about things that cannot be known: neither the reader's thoughts nor the author's intentions are accessible. Indeed, even if Hemingway had written a statement about what he meant to accomplish in a given story, it still should not be taken at face value. Such readings add nothing to the scholarly understanding of Hemingway's short fiction and ultimately obscure the contributions of one of America's finest writers.

James Nagel (Grantham, NH)

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