

BOOK REVIEWS

Kenneth G. Johnston

THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG: HEMINGWAY AND THE SHORT STORY.

Greenwood, Florida: The Penkevill Publishing Company, 1987. Pp. 315, \$30.00

Reviewed by Raymond S. Nelson

Kenneth Johnston's book *The Tip of the Iceberg* is a significant addition to Hemingway scholarship in a variety of ways. First, Johnston fixes attention on the short stories, many of which are superb, as among the best produced in America. Not enough attention has been given to the short stories, he believes, when one considers the breadth of criticism on Hemingway's work. This book helps redress the balance. Second, he interprets the stories in careful detail, focusing on symbols and poetic techniques carefully crafted by the author. He makes a good case for poetic prose. And third, Johnston stays quite closely to his proposition that Hemingway consistently and effectively practiced his iceberg theory of composition. That theory, in brief, is that the writer may leave anything out of a text deliberately, knowing that he has done so, and write better prose primarily because he has done so. Thus, for example, in the well known story "The Killers," no mention is made of Chicago and its bootlegging mobsters, yet because Hemingway knows all about that scene and chooses to omit it, the story is the stronger for it. So goes the theory. And finally, by way of general observation, Johnston says and pretty well proves that Hemingway did not create his fiction imaginatively "out of nothing." He had little talent for invention," says Johnston, "for concealing himself behind imagined characters or events; his forte was editing and structuring and stylizing his own personal experience and deeply felt emotions Despite his many claims to the contrary, the majority of Hemingway's stories are biographical fragments, which, when pieced together, constitute a truthful, rather complete record of his inner and outer life" (4).

Johnston spent about fifteen years preparing this book, in a sense, because he has brought together sixteen critical essays published from 1971 through 1986. He has added several to them to flesh out the volume.

The essays are organized chronologically in the order in which Hemingway published his stories, and they are carefully annotated. Johnston appends to each chapter two or three pages in which he discusses in regular order (1) the background to the story under discussion; (2) publication information; (3) typescript/manuscript variations (primarily from the Hemingway Collection at the Kennedy Library); (4) and Hemingway quotations relevant to the story. At the end of the book is an extensive set of notes to each chapter, with sources.

Johnston presents sound interpretive views of each story, often departing from widely accepted positions. A case in point from "The Short, Happy Life of Francis Macomber" is the shooting of Macomber. Most critics, influenced in their judgments by Wilson's statements, take the position that Margot shot her husband deliberately. But Johnston argues that she shot him accidentally while attempting to shoot the buffalo, and makes his point quite convincingly from textual evidence. In a similar way he offers fresh interpretations of "Out of Season" and "The Revolutionist," as well as several others.

In seeking to unravel meanings, Johnston has checked out the books and people and places and pictures that Hemingway mentions in his stories, to find that such references

illuminate the meaning of the stories. The books that Bill and Nick talk about in "Three Day Blow," for example, add a great deal of substance to the meaning of the tale. The story-lines in the books, known to both of the teenagers, contribute to the total impact of the short story itself.

Johnston's book is only fair in terms of its appearance. The type face is small and ugly, with a few too many typos; and because most of the chapters appeared separately over a fifteen year period, there is a bit of repetitiveness in expression, especially on the iceberg motif. But these are mere quibbles. The book is a valuable addition to scholarship on a major twentieth century American author.

Charles Bonn

*LE ROMAN ALGÉRIEN DE LANGUE FRANÇAISE,
VERS UN ESPACE DE COMMUNICATION
LITTÉRAIRE DÉCOLONISÉ?*

Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal and Paris: L'Harmattan, 1985. Pp. 359

Reviewed by Eric Sellin

Le Roman algérien is based on Charles Bonn's doctoral thesis. In this study, Bonn once again explores the notions of geography, space, and the reader's psychological interaction with, or "reception" of, the literary work, themes which he had broached earlier in his important study, *La Littérature algérienne de langue française et ses lectures, Imaginaire et discours d'idées* (Sherbrooke: Naaman, 1974).

Bonn is interested in the large strokes of the literature he deals with and sometimes he relies on too few works to establish his chronologies or generalizations; no doubt the exigencies of a thesis in the French system (one must not concentrate on one person only, but demonstrate vast competence) have left their mark on the study's structure. Thus, when Bonn takes a handful of classics to illustrate his premise, one cannot help but think of other examples which might serve to bolster or to contradict the premise.

The presentation of the book is in the fragmented style preferred by many contemporary critics who have forsaken the art of critical transition or the essay "qui se suffit" and which possesses a special "inevitable" progression of argument. Because of the broad strokes and the fragmented approach, there are lacunae which--I am sure--are not the result of any deficiency of knowledge, for Charles Bonn is a widely read and extremely conscientious scholar, but rather the result of chinks in the exposition. On page 25, for example, Bonn--relying on Jean Déjeux's charts in the latter's monumental but somewhat dated work, *Littérature maghrébine de langue française* (Ottawa [the first edition was not published in Sherbrooke as Bonn has it]: Naaman, 1973)--asserts that "le courant ethnographique, jusque-là continu depuis 1945 avec une seule interruption en 1959, s'arrêterait net à l'Indépendance, pour ne plus se manifester ensuite qu'une fois, en 1970, avec *Le Village des asphodèles*, d'Ali Boumahdi." Bonn agrees that the Revolution, and especially, the Independence, "peuvent donc être considérées comme une sommation de l'écrivain par l'Histoire."

The ethnographic novel, or the *Bildungsroman*, has continued, however, to be a convenient, almost traditional, way for young novelists to enter the literature. Recent examples--and they do not deal with the History of the revolution but rather the contemporary history the younger Algerians have lived through--are the first novels or *récits* by Tahar Djaout, Rabah Belamri, and Mohamed Magani, to name but a few.