

Michael Reynolds

HEMINGWAY'S FIRST WAR

Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987. Pp. 309, £7.95

Reviewed by Raymond S. Nelson

Michael Reynolds's *Hemingway's First War*, originally published in 1976 by Princeton University Press, is now published as a paperback by Blackwell Publishers. That eleven years should have passed between the original hard-cover and the present softcover suggests the high value some editors place upon the volume. The book deals primarily with *A Farewell to Arms*.

The book is organized in three sections: "1928-30: The Writer at Work," "1918-28: The Making of the Novel," and "Critical Response: Technique and Structure." Section One reconstructs Hemingway's early efforts to write the novel. And Reynolds offers a large number of manuscript excerpts of the novel to document the growth of the text. Section Two is the heart of the study, for in it Reynolds demonstrates that Hemingway did not base *A Farewell to Arms* primarily on his own experience during the Greco-Turkish retreat (which he covered as a reporter) or his month-long experience at Fossalta, as is generally believed, but from extensive research and reading in historical materials. Reynolds shows convincingly that Hemingway used *Baedeker's Guide to Italy* as well as official topographical maps, military histories by authors like G.M. Trevelyan, D.W. Johnson, Hugh Dalton, Luigi Villari, Cyril Falls, Ronald Seth, and Charles Bakewell. He talked to veterans from the Italian front and he gathered details from all available sources. Section Three of the book elaborates three organizational principles which Reynolds perceives in the text: foreshadowing, echoing, and role reversing.

The book is readable and convincing as to Hemingway's use of secondary material to create the sense of place at the Italian front. Such secondary materials would also be indispensable to Hemingway to refresh his memories of Stresa, Milan, and the Italian cities that he visited after the war as a European reporter for the *Toronto Star*; place references as well as the names of cafés and hotels are precise enough to suggest his dependence on such sources.

There are, however, two weaknesses in an otherwise fine book. One is the repetitive mention of the use of secondary sources instead of the autobiographical nature of much of Hemingway's work. Reynolds doth protest a bit too much, for he knows as well as most Hemingway scholars that Hemingway did exploit personal experiences endlessly. Reynolds says as much in several places. He might have balanced his argument a bit better than he does.

The second weakness is Reynolds's unqualified claim that Hemingway admired Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage*, written as it was thirty years after the Civil War had ended. He quotes Hemingway from his introduction to *Men at War* as saying, "Crane wrote [*The Red Badge of Courage*] before he had seen any war. But he had read contemporary accounts, had heard the old soldiers, they were not so old then, talk, and above all he had seen Matthew

Brady's wonderful photographs" (12). What Reynolds does not say—and surely should have—is that Hemingway also wrote of Crane's *Red Badge*, "[It is] the brilliant imagining of a sick boy who had never seen war but had only read the battles and chronicles and seen the Brady photographs." He also damns Willa Cather for doing precisely what Hemingway himself had done: based fiction on secondary sources. There is a 180-degree shift in judgment in the two statements; Hemingway has it both ways, apparently. Yet Reynolds does not mention Hemingway's earlier devastating attitude to people who based their fiction on secondary sources.

Reynolds has a central thesis for his book, and he makes it clearly. He overstates the argument, however, panning a great deal of earlier criticism in the process. It is unquestionably a useful book about *A Farewell to Arms*, but it is not a great one.

David Seed

THE FICTIONAL LABYRINTHS OF THOMAS PYNCHON

Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988. Pp. 268 \$25.00

Reviewed by Lance Olsen

Reading David Seed's often interesting if finally flawed chronological study of Thomas Pynchon's stories and novels is frequently like standing three inches away from a Seurat canvas. It is easy enough to distinguish a host of intricate and admirable colorpoints, but it is impossible to figure out exactly what they are all supposed to add up to. Seed never discusses the theoretical nature of his approach; he never states the goal of his book; and the closest he comes to a thesis is the hardly ground-breaking observation in his unfocused introductory chapter: because it is difficult to tie Pynchon down to a single viewpoint and because he combines popular art forms and abstruse information, Pynchon's reader is "often as entrapped within a labyrinth of reference as his characters" (11). A poor editing job which allows for an embarrassingly large number of typos, punctuation errors, and stylistic tics further undermines this study's overall effect.

At the same time that Seed is short on general arguments which might pull Pynchon's project into a new and provocative focus, he is long on details and close thoughtful local readings. His first chapter, for instance, intelligently explores how the themes and techniques found in Pynchon's stories prefigure his later work. Although sometimes heavy on synopsis and esoterica, Seed provides one of the most meticulous and complete readings of "Entropy" to date. In his discussion of *V*, he provides some fine interconnections among the historical sections and argues for the novel's unity on thematic grounds. His examination of *The Crying of Lot 49* provides an extended reading of "The Courier's Tragedy" and links the social dimension of the novel to "A Journey Into The Mind of Watts," Pynchon's little-discussed 1966 article. In his diffuse chapter on *Gravity's Rainbow*, Seed spends some worthwhile time with Pynchon's use of Norman O. Brown and with the novel's subversive comic impulse.