

# REVIEWS

J Frederick Voss, ed. *Picturing Hemingway: A Writer in His Time*.  
Washington, D.C. and New Haven: The Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery in association  
with Yale University Press, 1999. 111p.

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In the twentieth century, Ernest Hemingway was one of the few writers inside or outside the United States who succeeded in cutting a wide path both to literary and worldly fame. Noticeably, through his writing and public persona, Hemingway came to embody the myth of American individuality and virile courage in the wake of the United States' rise "from upstart nation" to greatest world power after World War I and onto our days (1). Frederick Voss' *Picturing Hemingway* is the latest book to pay homage to the author's biographical hagiography as the one American writer whose "personal reputation as the all-around man of action ultimately eclipsed his own widely revered fiction" (13). Published in commemoration of Hemingway's one-hundredth birthday as a companion to the exhibition that the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery ran between June 18 and November 7, 1999, this volume is essentially a pictorial celebration of the Hemingway myth.

The book focuses mainly on images and their interpretation (rather than on a critical visitation or analysis of Hemingway's literary record) to discuss the author's life and its accomplishments in a wider cultural context. Accompanied by two introductory essays -- one by Michael Reynolds who just completed a monumental five-volume biography on Hemingway, the other by the editor Frederick Voss -- it describes, through pictures, paintings, and other assorted materials, Hemingway's life and career. Thus, one moves from a replica of the *Kansas City Star's* manual of journalistic style that helped Hemingway discover the virtues of crisp, concise writing (58) to a picture of his first love, Agnes von Kurowsky (60); from a poster announcing the annual bullfights in Pamplona to which Hemingway participated with enthusiasm (77) to a cartoon depicting the "reporter" Hemingway at the Hotel Scribe in Paris during World War II (89). Each picture is annotated with the name of its author or source, date, size, and current location (the two largest contributors to the exhibit being the Ernest Hemingway Collection at the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library in Boston, and the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at Princeton University). In addition, the materials in the main section, titled "A Life in Portraits," come with captions that provide ulterior information for those readers not familiar with the Hemingway lore -- as is the case with the family portrait that introduces us to young Hemingway's childhood, where the editor adds that Hemingway eventually "came to detest his mother, whom he saw as domineering, and to disdain his father, whom he regarded as a weakling" (53).

The two articles that preface the portrait section, Reynolds' "Hemingway as American Icon" and Voss' "Picturing Ernest Hemingway," provide summary, overlapping accounts of Hemingway's biography. Both suggest that Hemingway's public persona already in life overshadowed the author's literary fame and stylistic modernism, but they themselves tend to underplay the private dimensions

of Hemingway's life. Voss, however, does attempt to provide the less known background for the genesis of certain famous Hemingway images, even if rarely does the volume as a whole balance the hagiographical aspects of Hemingway's myth with the more controversial and disturbing aspects of the author's persona. So, in the end, the book continues to emphasize the stature of the public Hemingway, as the reader sees replicated, for the most part, those pictures and episodes of the author's life that have already been celebrated through their appearances on the covers or inside-spreads of magazines and newspapers between 1930 and 1960.

The last section, "A Life in Portraits" holds true to the book's promise to present Hemingway "in his time," as there are fewer pictures depicting the author himself and more showing his friends, collaborators, book covers of first editions, etc. (There are 21 pictures in which Hemingway appears against 29 where he is not present.) Yet, one notices the relative absence of pictures depicting Hemingway's own family life, which again underscores its relative insignificance vis-à-vis the public persona that the author and his hagiographers wished to create. Unfortunately, it is impossible to determine whether this lacuna in portraying the more private Hemingway is due to a conscious choice on the part of the editor or was inherent in the exhibition's layout, because the volume lacks a complete list of the exhibits' original contents.

This book is obviously not meant to provide a comprehensive appraisal of Hemingway as a person or literary figure. Instead, its eminently visual nature makes it a good companion volume for those who already know much about Hemingway's life and work, or a good introduction for the general reader who has heard about the Hemingway myth and wishes to know more.