Philip Young. ***American Fiction, American Myth***. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000. 288p.

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In a posthumously published book, *American Fiction, American Myth* culls a liberal sampling from "a wealth of uncollected essays" by the celebrated Hemingway scholar, Philip Young. Known not only for his first work *Ernest Hemingway* (1952) that started a famed quarrel with the Pulitzer Prize winner, Young also published critiques on other important American writers — most recently *Hawthorne's Secret: An Un-told Tale* (1984) and *The Private Melville* (1993). As critic and scholar, he is best known for his careful analyses and his engaging style that is as readable as it is poignant.

As can be inferred from the Table of Contents, *American Fiction, American Myth*'s greatest limitation is the diversity of the topics selected by the editors David Morrell and Sandra Spanier. The first of three sections, "American Myth" is comprised of early essays that probe why some myths — like Pocahontas — endure: "Nothing survives indefinitely without filling some function, and the usefulness of the story is clear" (43). The next section, "Our Hemingway Man," consists of six essays that consider professional, private, and personal aspects of the author. One of these essays, "Hemingway and Me," was previously published as a defense/autobiographical account of Young's first book and Hemingway's attempt to stop publication of it. Lastly, "Scholar at Large" contains ten articles; Young's earliest published essay, a quasi-psychoanalysis on Poe (1951), is included along with a late rumination on writing in Pennsylvania compared to New York City (1985). Many of the "essays" were originally lectures and still maintain the ice-breaking jokes peculiar to the crowd Young was addressing as disparate as the Peace Corps, Westminster College, and Indian students at the University of New Delhi. While this variety certainly attests to Young's flexibility, it does not form a unified book.

In his essay "Big World Out There," which was originally written as an introduction to the collection "The Nick Adams Stories," Young comments on the "trivial fragments" that were collected and published after Hemingway's death. Although he was the principal promoter and laborer of this project, he wonders how the author would have felt about these pieces "presented to the public as 'stories'" and decides "it's a pretty safe bet that he wouldn't be happy about it" (98). I'm inclined to think that Young — who only published five meticulous books during his lifetime — would feel the same way about this amalgamation of his works.

That being said, the justification for the book, like the scraps of Hemingway's, is that Young disciples can have access to writings hitherto inaccessible and broaden their knowledge of his work and the works he wrote about. His analyses which include "a multi-faceted approach to scholarship called American Studies" often bases the critique on an "author's background and culture" which he saw as "important to understanding a text." Yet, Young does not allow this information to completely overshadow a critical reading as exemplified in "Mother of Us All": "Exactly what happened would not seem to make any enormous difference anyway. What counts more is the truly extraordinary way in which the story — despite the profound awkwardness of a climax that comes in the opening scene — pervades our culture" (32).

In addition to probing questions that matter, Young's style is accessible and readable; even the early essays attest to the frankness, straightforwardness, and depth of perception that is unique to him. Such lines as "melancholy of late, the writer was pleased to find himself laughing" and "Peter Rugg, the missing man, is nearly everywhere missing" keep the reader entertained. But it is also engaging in its insight: "I've been chiefly assuming that literature is valuable in that it offers deep and rewarding insights that are not otherwise readily attainable — insights into such things as national character and experience, finally into human nature and ourselves, and life itself" (155). Despite the refreshing style, the disparity of the essays make this book most helpful to scholars already familiar with Young's work who are interested in completing their collections.