
REVIEWS

Ronald Berman. *Modernity and Progress: Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Orwell*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005. 123p.

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In this short study on the relationship between time and progress in literature of the 1920s, Ronald Berman circumvents all-encompassing definitions of progress, modernity, or modernism. Instead, he devotes an introduction and six chapters to progressive elements in key and lesser-studied works by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and George Orwell. By situating the concept of time as having “heavier caliber as a subject of modernism” than other notions of progress, Berman is able to unearth exactly the concerns that made the moderns so modern (6). Cracks in the intellectual foundation of linear time occurred during the same early-20th-century period that saw shifts in philosophical, psychoanalytic, and scientific perceptions of space and consciousness. Berman astutely connects these perceptual changes to the ways in which modernist writers perceive progress through their representations of landscape, regionalism, nationalism, and intellectualism.

As Berman outlines the complex and, at times, contradictory understandings of progress in the works of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Orwell, he reveals a new way of reading modernism’s investment in the present and, in doing so, distinguishes inherent perceptual differences that marked the 20th century from the 19th century. This change did not occur all at once, but rather occurred through strands of perceptual changes that connect in philosophy and literature. Berman illustrates these gradual shifts by devoting each chapter to a theme of progress and a specific author. In the first of the two chapters dedicated to Fitzgerald’s works, Berman demonstrates how concepts of time are linked to a particularly 20th-century understanding of region. He argues that Fitzgerald sets up a “clearly . . . *modern* conflict between North and South” that re-envision a national divide along fantasies of tradition and progress (12). This national conflict is written into what Berman calls the “geography of progress” wherein North and East are aligned against West and South in 1920s intellectual constructions of progress as tied to industrial development (14). Berman reads stories such as “The Ice Palace” as a regional conflict of urban versus rural, of present versus past. The repeated pattern of North marrying South, a pattern that mirrors Fitzgerald’s own marriage to Zelda Sayre, is written into stories such as “Basil and Cleopatra” and “The Third Casket” in ways that reflect Fitzgerald’s

understanding of American history and regional conflict. Berman returns to this idea of landscape, both in terms of place and in the metaphoric landscapes of politics and the mind, in each of the subsequent chapters.

In the most engaging section of the book, Berman elaborates the idea of place as representing modern ideas of progress in a chapter that traces the influence of Paul Cézanne on Hemingway's use of landscape. Just as Cézanne repeated the subject of a painting numerous times, Hemingway made repetition of landscape part of his language. Repeated images of place in Hemingway's works—the curving road in “Indian Camp,” “The Battler,” “Big Two-Hearted River,” and “The Three-Day Blow,” for example—extracts from technique interesting questions about the possibility of representation, about relativity, and about the irregularity of nature. Though such moments of clear connection between modernisms are rare in this book, when they come they do much work to illuminate why the early 20th century has been so artistically and intellectually influential.

Berman is particularly adept at situating literature within its intellectual contexts, unweaving the many narratives of progress with skill. In his discussion of geography and progress, he considers Fitzgerald's works in relation to how H. L. Mencken and Harold E. Stearns chronicled the era's understanding of progress as it is linked with ideas of tradition and the passage of time. Berman ties early-century shifts in national identity to Hemingway's critiques of Americanism that were written amid contemporary discussions of American intellectualism, such as those by George Santayana, Lewis Mumford, and Walter Lippman. He posits that Hemingway's technique of referring to characters by monikers—the “young gentleman” in “Out of Season” or the “American lady” in “A Canary for One”—underscores a critique of American values that are written amid a confused cultural relationship between morality and class. Hemingway's physical geographic shifts—from the United States to Europe—correspond with his shifts in ideas and subjects. This shift mirrored changes that the concepts of “thought, memory, perception, and experience” were undergoing in the 1920s, spurned on by intellectuals such as Ludwig Wittgenstein and Bertrand Russell (55). Similarly, Berman points out the ways in which Einstein's theory of relativity provides a basis for understanding how the train timetable in *The Great Gatsby*, the punching of time cards in “Dalyruple Goes Wrong,” or the list of years in “His Russet Witch” all work in Fitzgerald's fiction to question how time functions in linear and non-linear ways.

Though Berman's text contains no Conclusion, he reserves Orwell and his archetypal theories of progress for the last chapter. In it, he traces the influences that contributed to Orwell's ideas of progress—ideas reflected in statements such as

“civilization is a process in the service of Eros”—as influenced by questions of the political mediation of personal relationships in Aristotle’s *Politics* and, most especially, of the power over mind and body in Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents* (83). It is in this last chapter that the validity of linking Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Orwell under the umbrella of progress is realized. Through the three authors’ references to the changing meanings of time, a new understanding of progress is formed. It is a complicated understanding, and one that could bear more prolonged study. ✱