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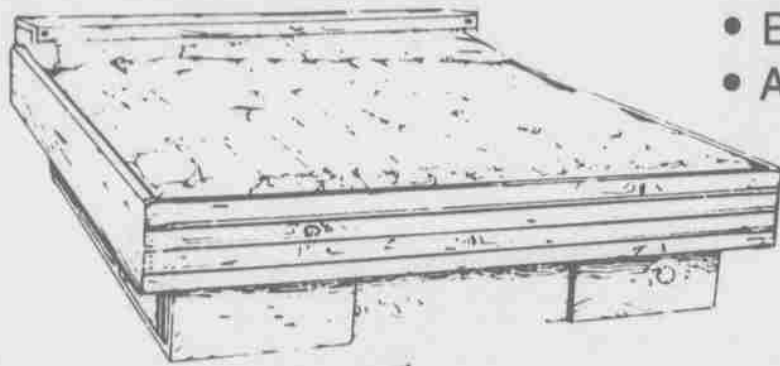
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Protagonist development rewarding in new Hemingway

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

The Garden of Eden



A NOVEL

cover courtesy of Charles Scribner and Sons

Review by Ken DiMaggio
Staff Reporter

"The hardest thing in the world to do," wrote Ernest Hemingway, "is to write straight honest prose on human beings." It's fitting for the man who wrote those words to leave us a posthumous novel about sexual ambiguity. It's even more fitting that his novel, where the male protagonist plays a feminine role to satisfy his wife's new adopted masculinity, should come at a time of Reagan, Rambo and cheap, easy conquests like the Grenada invasion.

I feel that manhood in America has presently reached its lowest point. The American male has become a caricature. Once again he's become the Man in the Grey Flannel Suit — see GQ for the updated version. But few movies, books and plays show little, if anything, of what the inside of this successful American man is like.

In "The Garden of Eden," Hemingway makes his young successful author, David Bourne, play a contrary role. He cuts his hair short like his wife Catherine's, dyes it the same blonde color and becomes her female partner in bed.

Later, Catherine will take a young Spanish woman named Marita for a lover. But because

she is never secure in this relationship, her husband seduces Marita away from his wife, who then has a nervous breakdown.

But the internal struggle in this novel is rooted in the short story the protagonist is writing. While David Bourne is trying to become a woman, he tries to fight off his father's influence when he is a small child and they are on a hunting trip in Africa. By the end of the novel, David will reject the feminine role his wife has tried to impose on him, and will reaffirm his masculine role in his new relationship with Marita. But he will have done so by rejecting the strong patriarchal values of his father, who always makes conquests of nature.

This is the only Hemingway hero for me that is triumphant. The older and successful David Bourne comes to full maturity in the child that stands up against his father and refuses to kill an elephant that he has grown sympathetic towards and comes to love. The young David Bourne gives the older one the virtues to make him a man — love, compassion and communion with nature. For once, the warrior in Hemingway's fiction finds greater virtue in laying down his weapon, resisting the will to conquer and kill. For once the hero in Hemingway's fiction wins in losing the contest, the hunt, the fight. And it is both significant and ironic that Hemingway should choose a child to withstand the pressures of a compelling and authoritarian nature.

His father waited for him to come up and said very gently, "He rested here. He's not travelling as he was. We'll be up on him anytime now."

"Fuck elephant hunting," David had said very quietly.

"What's that?" his father asked.

"Fuck elephant hunting," David said softly.

"Be careful you don't fuck it up," his father had said to him and looked at him flatly.

That's one thing, David had thought. . . . He knows all about it now and he will never trust me again. That's good. . . because I'll never tell him or anybody anything again never anything again. Never ever never.

But the older David finally comes of age by placing himself in a sexual role that his father could never conceive of. In the end, it is David who becomes a man, his father, the boy that lived in fear and confusion inside a man's body.

PAT EGAN PRESENTS CLUB PERSHING

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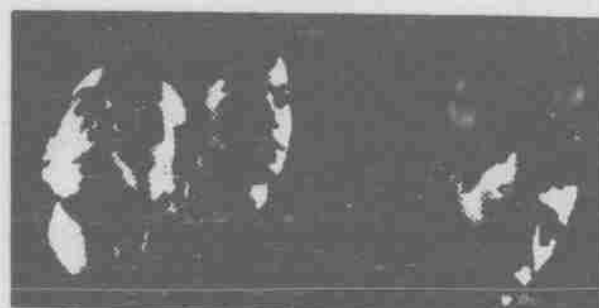


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