

Gauguin's legacy "under the rubric of 'narrative.'" It's a misbegotten effort, in Schwabsky's view. Gauguin was not a storyteller. "The bodies and faces of the Polynesian women Gauguin incessantly painted were not simply offered up for delectation and the projection of fantasies. They possess their own intelligence and keep their own counsel; their slyness and self-possession make them resistant to interpretation, almost indecipherable. Gauguin identified with them precisely because he could not entirely 'read' them."

What matters most about Gauguin is his use of color. His "rich cadences of dissonance and harmony [made] out of color and line, the likes of which had no more been seen before in painting than had his Polynesian subjects," capture a moment and a mood, but their stories are hidden.

ARTS & LETTERS

Papa's Painful Passion

THE SOURCE: "Hemingway in Love: Four Found Letters" by Jeffrey Meyers, in *Raritan*, Summer 2010.

IT SOUNDS A BIT LIKE A HEMINGWAY novel: An aging novelist, bound for Europe on the *Île de France* with his fourth wife, meets a vivacious, attractive fellow passenger, and during the long Atlantic crossing flirtation blossoms into infatuation. During the ensuing month's sojourn in France, the young woman—to the annoyance of the novelist's wife—joins them, and not even the arrival of the woman's own husband blunts the budding affair.

Four recently discovered love letters reveal the players in this *ménage à quatre*: Ernest Hemingway, fresh from completing *Across the River and Into the Trees* (1950), his first novel in 10 years; his wife, Mary; Jigee Viertel (née Virginia Ray of Pittsburgh); and Viertel's husband, Peter, also a writer, who later penned a memoir of Hemingway, *Dangerous Friends*. According to Berkeley-based writer Jeffrey Meyers, author of a 1999 biography of Hemingway, "these letters reveal Hemingway constructing and prolonging a romantic fantasy, part paternal and protective, part courtly and devoted." Jigee seems to have both encouraged and enjoyed the older novelist's attention, and made no effort to conceal it from her husband. Hemingway, she told Peter, simply needed to be "a tiny bit in love with someone in order to feel more alive."

"When you went away," Hemingway wrote to Jigee, after she and Peter left for Paris, "I missed you so badly that better not to talk, nor think, nor write it." He told her, "I feel like people feel after big amputations." He portrayed himself, in a letter sent the next day, as "the loneliest worst dressed man in the world," but made no mention of his wife. Yet it was around this time that Hemingway confessed to Mary—as she revealed in a later memoir—"in devastating detail Jigee's campaign to snare him. [Mary] obviously doesn't appreciate you. We'll have a ranch with horses in California and you can give up the heat of Cuba. I understand your wonderful sensibilities."

Despite these intimate glimpses into Hemingway's doings, Meyers aligns himself with Peter Viertel's

impression of the relationship. Hemingway was, as Meyers puts it, "more in love with the idea of love than with the actual woman, and his painful passion for Jigee was probably not consummated."

Hemingway's infatuation with Jigee fits neatly into a pattern noted earlier by F. Scott Fitzgerald, who once observed, "I have a theory that Ernest needs a new woman for each big book. There was one for the stories and *The Sun Also Rises*. Now there's Pauline [his second wife]. *A Farewell to Arms* is a big book. If there's another big book I think we'll find Ernest has another wife." As Hemingway aged, Meyers believes, and became "more anxious, fearful about his health and his creativity, he needed to be 'a tiny bit in love with someone' to ward off despair and remind him of how he felt when he wrote his best work."

Hemingway's battle with despair ended in suicide in 1961. Jigee, too, met a sad end. Peter abandoned her when she was pregnant with their only child, and she became an alcoholic; in 1960, Meyers reports, "she accidentally lit her nightgown with her cigarette, suffered horrible burns, and died after a month in hospital."

ARTS & LETTERS

The Death of Dance?

THE SOURCE: "Last Rites" by Sara Hamdan, in *First Things*, Aug.–Sept. 2010.

ONLY A FEW DECADES AGO, Mikhail Baryshnikov and Rudolf Nureyev graced the covers of

national magazines. Today, dancers and choreographers find that even a steady income, let alone this degree of fame, is nearly impossible to attain. According to Sara Hamdan, herself a former dancer, “the dance world is crumbling, and young dancers . . . are training for a profession that grows smaller and less significant by the year.”

Dance has fallen out of favor with the public, especially younger audiences. Ballet attendance dropped by a third between 1982 and 2008 and by nearly half among those 18 to 24.

Dance demands a lot of its audience—it’s not an iPod experience. The legacies of the innovative choreographers who turned dance into “a cultural sensation” in the 20th century are now at risk. The Paul Taylor Dance Company, for example, stages about half as many shows today as it did in 2008 and earns fees that are much less than those it received not long ago. The New York City Ballet has laid off dancers, reduced staff salaries, and initiated a hiring freeze, but still has a large deficit.

The only way dance will recover is by finding a way to appeal to young people, Hamdan says. Tough customers, they hold an idea of dance that reflects what they see on videos and television—dance as competition or as a display of pure physical talent. Ballet and modern dance have traditionally concerned themselves with conveying meaningful narratives, and dance companies are reluctant to experiment. Instead, they pour money into restoring marble lobbies and proscenium arches—not a shrewd way

to attract people who are put off by the expense and formality of dance.

Trained dancers find themselves in a difficult situation as companies continue to close, leaving a large number of talented dancers competing for a shrinking number of positions. Much like journalism schools, dance schools have continued to churn out trained professionals despite the field’s decline. Even those dancers with paying work usually need to take on other jobs to pay their bills. Younger dancers find themselves vying against veterans for positions with minor companies. The traditional system of handing down knowledge from one dance generation to the next is breaking down. “Slowly but surely,” Hamdan notes, “a career path is fading away.”

ARTS & LETTERS

The Paradox of Words

THE SOURCE: “The Muse of Impossibility” by Alberto Manguel, in *The Threepenny Review*, Fall 2010.

ARGENTINE ESSAYIST ALBERTO Manguel believes that at the heart of writing lies a paradox: Writers think that they “can construct (or reconstruct) the world through words”—that language can, by expressing reality, create reality—but at the same time, capturing the world with words is impossible. Writers can never create anything more than “something that suggests an approximation to a copy of a blurry intuition of the real thing,” Manguel writes. “All our

The best that writers can achieve, says Argentine essayist Alberto Manguel, is “an approximation to a copy of a blurry intuition of the real thing.”

libraries are the glorious record of that failure.”

The conviction that language can create worlds is an ancient one. According to Jewish mystical thought, God created the 22 letters of Hebrew, and all beings came into existence through the “mere interweaving” of the alphabet: The words of God created the earth and all that lives upon it.

But, Manguel says, this story has a counterpart—the story of the Tower of Babel, where God divided the world’s unified tongue into many, and no longer could any single language encapsulate the essence of any thing. Taken together, these stories illustrate both the promise and the limitations of language.

Every time we use words to express ourselves, we implicitly declare our faith in the words’ ability to convey what we mean, but, says Manguel, “faith in language is, like all true faiths, unaltered by a practice that contradicts its claims—unaltered in spite of our knowledge that whenever we try to say something, however simple, however clear-cut, only a shadow of that something travels from our conception to its utterance, and further from its utterance to its reception and understanding.”