



Hawkwood Books Blog : August 2024

The Language of Love

I'm almost finished reading *A Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway. Love shines through the terrors of the first world war but the language used creeps under the weight of time, reflecting astonishing changes in society. It's easy to mimic and belittle the dialogue, so I will, but with good intentions. It's reminiscent of *Brief Encounter* and occasionally, *Round The Horne*. "Oh, my darling, do you love me?" "Always." "Forever?" "Forever, my darling." "You'll never leave me?" "Never." "Never, darling?" "Never!" and so on. These are my words, not a quote, but the passion might easily be lost in the choice of words.

We are now in 2024 and male/female expectations have changed beyond all recognition. Accepted roles have been ripped away and gender stereotypes of traditional love have become almost criminalised. Certainly, changes were in order and society heads in who knows what mysterious directions, perhaps to an Ian M Banks future of free-changing genders, or an Amazonian hierarchy, who's to say. This isn't judgemental, certainly not in an atmosphere of such linguistic policing, but it took an effort of will to get through the superficially silly-sounding dialogue to the deep convictions with which it was written.

There is something noble about the love of the main characters, despite the many 'darlings'. There is a bond between Henry and Catherine which is hard to find in contemporary fiction. I recognise it in my own parental relationships, but I don't see it any longer. Am I blind or has love morphed into something selfish and noisy? Words like tenderness and humility could be taken out of the dictionary today, they are so rarely used. This is a brash, crass, greedy world we live in, where bonds of affection, if such a word also still exists, are more like fights for sexual supremacy and individual liberation.

Are these rapidly fading classic romances doomed, lost in the red mists of anger, arrogance and rebellion? It seems like such a pity if that's the case. The media would have us believe that might is right, that noise is all, that he or she who shouts loudest wins, that love is a battle, that softness is a thing of the past. If we don't have the language of love, or misuse it, does that mean that we cannot love? I don't think so. Language can confuse and mislead as well as reveal, but the volume of high decibel love in film, audio and books is hard to avoid, and we are imitative creatures, taking on the characteristics of what we see, hear and feel.

I think that we are a poorer species without the tenderness of love, expressed in whatever way we can, without its inherent generosity and necessary sacrifices - on both sides. Language has to evolve, that is a given. We do not speak the language of Beowulf, Chaucer or Shakespeare, Dickens or even Hemingway. Language seems to simplify in some respects and complicate in others, but in the language of love, if we lose the gentle intent of great writers and artists, then we lose the most treasured part of human experience.