

Redefining remate: Hemingway's professed approach to writing *A Moveable Feast*.

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 **Redefining *Remate*: Hemingway's Professed Approach to Writing *A Moveable Feast***

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Redefining *Remate*:
Hemingway's Professed Approach to Writing *A Moveable Feast*

Suzanne del Gizzo

For nearly fifty years, Hemingway scholars have used the term *remate* to describe Hemingway's unique approach to autobiography and memoir. Their use of this term is traceable to a 10 May 1964 article by Mary Hemingway in *The New York Times Book Review*, where she discusses the "conception" and "construction" of her husband's posthumously published memoir, *A Moveable Feast*. Mary recounts a conversation with Ernest about the genre of *Feast*, prompted by her complaint as she was preparing the typescript that: "It's not much about you. . . . I thought it was going to be autobiography." She recalls Hemingway's response: "It's biography by *remate*" and goes on to gloss his meaning, "*Remate* idiomatically is used to mean a two-wall shot in jai alai. By reflection." This exchange is noteworthy for two reasons: first, according to Mary, Ernest changed her designation of *Feast*'s genre from "autobiography" to "biography" in his response to her, and second, her translation of *remate* as a jai alai term that means "by reflection" is not accurate or complete.

It is impossible to know what exactly Hemingway said, although clearly "biography by *remate*" would mean something different from "autobiography by *remate*." In *Hemingway: The Writer as Artist* (1972), Carlos Baker identified this subtle shift in genre in Mary's statement but chalks it up as a mistake and tries to settle the issue when he writes in a footnote: "[Hemingway] was doing autobiography rather than biography [in *Feast*]" (375). Since that time, most critics have followed Baker's lead and referred to *Feast* [End Page 121] almost exclusively as "autobiography" and Hemingway's method of writing as "autobiography by *remate*."¹ Although there is probably more to say on this topic, the focus of my discussion will be Mary's use of the term *remate*.

Since Mary made this claim, the notion that Hemingway was working "by *remate*" in *Feast* has informed numerous critical efforts, but it appears that either Mary's memory, her Spanish, or her knowledge of jai alai was not quite accurate. In this note, I want to track a potential misunderstanding of Hemingway's notion of (auto)biography and memoir (and of *A Moveable Feast* in particular) that has extended from Mary's statement that *remate* means "by reflection."

Remate is a rich and unusual word. It comes from the Spanish verb, *rematar*, which literally means “to re-kill,” with the suggestion of “to kill” coming from *matar*. *Remate* is frequently translated into English as “to finish” or “to complete.” Mary is right to identify the word as a jai alai term, but traditionally *remate* is used to refer to any type of “kill shot,” a shot so forceful or perfectly placed that it cannot be returned.² Although a *remate* shot can be a “two-wall shot” as Mary defined it in her 1964 *New York Times* article, it need not be; the purpose in identifying a shot as a *remate* in jai alai is to make the point that it is un-returnable. In addition, given Hemingway’s lifelong love of bullfighting, it is also worth noting that *remate* has roots in that art as well. According to Barnaby Conrad’s *Encyclopedia of Bullfighting*, *remate* means “[l]iterally conclusion. A finishing pass, such as the *rebolera*, [a flourish to the passes in which the cape is swirled around the bullfighter’s waist like a dancer’s dress]” (Conrad 205). The same encyclopedia defines *rematar* as “to complete. To finish a series of passes” (205). James A. Michener also lists *remate* among the bullfighting definitions in his introduction to *The Dangerous Summer*. His definition is “end, conclusion,” a “master pass” that leaves the bull “motionless” (27). Mary’s interpretation of the word thus appears suspect, because it misses the essence of the word, which is “to finish” conclusively and “to end” absolutely.

Before continuing this exploration of *remate*’s genealogy in Hemingway scholarship, I want to be clear that this note is in no way meant to diminish the excellent work done by Hemingway scholars and critics who took Mary Hemingway at her...

REDEFINING *REMADE*:
HEMINGWAY'S PROFESSED APPROACH
TO WRITING *A MOVEABLE FEAST*

SUZANNE DEL GIZZO

Chestnut Hill College

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