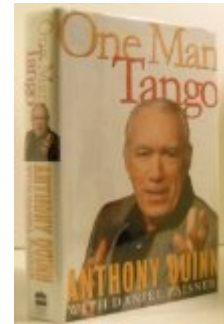


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Anthony Quinn, Daniel Paisner. *One Man Tango*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995. 388 pp. No price listed (cloth), ISBN 978-0-06-018354-7.

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Metaphorical Journeys

This second installment of Anthony Quinn's autobiography underscores the immense success this actor has achieved during his 60-year career and, at the same time, demonstrates the perils of revealing the seamy details behind that professional triumph. The net result of *One Man Tango*—written by Quinn with the assistance of journalist Daniel Paisner—is an irritating mixture of significant historical material and tawdry anecdote, an autobiographical bumper car that careens wildly from such important questions as Hollywood's racial stereotyping to trivial matters like Quinn's own sexual peccadilloes. Perhaps what is most unfortunate is that Quinn's unquenchable egomania so dominates his book as to render suspect everything within its pages.

One Man Tango could so easily have been different. Quinn begins with an intriguing and well-conceived narrative framework: a day-long, 40-kilometer bicycle ride across the seven hills of Rome during which the nearly 80-year-old actor will face his aging body's limitations and at the same time confront the significant and often painful memories of his life. The parallels between the actual and metaphorical journeys are effective at times: the poverty of the Italian countryside, for instance, elicits connections with Quinn's impoverished childhood in the slums of Chihuahua, El Paso, and East Los Angeles. A few of the sites offer more than metaphor: the World War II-era American military cemetery at Nettuno bears the body of the young man who, because of illness, had to give up his role in a Noel Coward play at a Hollywood acting school and helped a young Quinn—then working as a janitor at the school and taking occasional classes—

prepare for his first acting part; an elderly waiter in a seaside restaurant is the same man who 40 years earlier served Quinn and a young Italian director named Federico Fellini as they worked on the story that would give him one of his most important roles, the strongman Zampano in *La Strada* (1954).

Unfortunately, the narrative framework of *One Man Tango* quickly collapses under the weight of Quinn's own obsessions. It takes no more than a passing glance at a prostitute or the appearance of two young lovers in Anzio to send Quinn off onto the subject of his escapades with Carole Lombard, Rita Hayworth, Maureen O'Hara, Ingrid Bergman, Bergman's daughter Pia Lindstrom, and dozens of others. Most of these brief liaisons were conducted while Quinn was married to Cecil B. DeMille's adopted daughter, Katherine. And virtually no connection to the narrative device is even attempted as Quinn ranges through an interminable series of anecdotes featuring famous colleagues and acquaintances including Aimee Semple McPherson (for whom Quinn preached as a young man), Frank Lloyd Wright, William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Charlie Chaplin, Greta Garbo, Howard Hughes, Marlon Brando (who dubbed Quinn the "one man tango"), Gary Cooper, Laurence Olivier, John Kennedy, and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.

Of course, much of this is to be expected from a Hollywood autobiography. What remains most frustrating about *One Man Tango*, though, are the missed opportunities. While Quinn vents his anger, for instance, at the

racial stereotyping that cast him as Indian and gangster for much of his career, he provides little analysis of the culture and system that fed that typecasting; nor does he display any self-consciousness about the role of gender in Hollywood. In the scattered moments when Quinn can hold his own volatile emotions at bay and bring his vigorous, no-nonsense critical powers to bear on serious

topics, his autobiography becomes as significant as the extraordinary life it chronicles. *One Man Tango* will provide a useful blueprint and emotional touchstone for future Anthony Quinn biographers, but for the moment it offers little interest to the serious student of Hollywood filmmaking.

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