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**The Disputed Gender and Sexual Constructs during Wartime in Ernest
Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms***

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Abstract of the Thesis

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This essay argues the various gender constructions in *A Farewell to Arms*, which serve to challenge the sexual norms of the 1930's. In addition, this essay thoroughly analyzes Hemingway's possible intentions by crafting a character such as Catherine Barkley. It also underlines the various connections between the characters, in addition to the meanings of the underlying ambiguity in the connections between the characters. It analyzes the roles, which both Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley play in each other's lives, and the individual roles each character contributes to their relationship. Moreover, it analyzes the conventions of marriage in the context of the war, and how it pertains to the couple's relationship. This essay also dissects many of the homoerotic undertones present in the novel, mainly between Frederic Henry, Rinaldi and the priest, in addition to the homoerotic undertones between Catherine Barkley and Helen Ferguson. The novel's emphasis on the some of these unconventional relationships reveals that it seeks to invent new forms of unions that serve as possible modes of survival during the chaos of wartime, and perhaps Hemingway's own desire to overturn oppressive societal dictates regarding sexual expression.

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In *A Farewell to Arms*, Ernest Hemingway introduces the character of Frederic Henry, an ambulance driver on the Italian front during World War I, unveiling a convoluted story of love, gender interaction and masculine identity. When the novel was first published in 1929, critics were reading it with a close lens on Hemingway's life, attesting that most parts of the novel could be seen as an autobiographical account of his experience during the war in Italy. This critical conversation progressed as feminist readers began to feel repulsed, unable to fathom how Hemingway's misogynistic characters were so easily overlooked. Furthermore, the novel reveals less traditional sexual norms for its time, describing the men's rendezvous with prostitutes, drinking, engaging in sexual relations outside of the institution of marriage, and in hospital beds while soldiers were recovering. In addition, when analyzing the role of gender and sexuality in the novel, one should analyze the insinuation that Rinaldi makes about Henry and the priest being "a little that way" (Hemingway 65). Moreover, Hemingway leaves the perplexing nature of Rinaldi and Henry's relationship open for interpretation. By alluding to homoerotic subtleties, Hemingway places the novel into a new category that transgresses conventions related to the Catholic Church, the military, and homosexual relations, not only during the time of war but even today. *A Farewell to Arms* incorporates these sexual nuances owing to a blend of Hemingway's personal dissatisfaction with the cultural definitions of masculine and feminine identities, and the very character of the sexual norms of his time.

At first glance, *A Farewell to Arms* seems like a romantic love story during a time of war. However, there are some who will disagree. There is perhaps no other character

in *A Farewell to Arms* that provokes so many contradictory feelings as Catherine Barkley. While some may interpret Catherine as being aware of the way she is perceived, and is in fact in control, others severely object to her passivity. Feminist critic Judith Fetterley discusses Frederic Henry as a misogynistic character whose “real definition of a good woman is she who knows what she exists for and does it and lets you know she likes it” (Fetterley 204). Feminist gender criticism of the novel began as an all out attack on the stereotypical roles of men and women. Some view Catherine as a function of Henry’s life rather than being her own distinct individual character. Although it is difficult to completely unravel Hemingway’s true intentions, the reader’s analysis rests on Henry’s point of view: “it is he whom we are asked to identify, and it is his evaluations that we are asked to accept” (Fetterley 259). She goes on to clarify that “at no place in the book can we locate a clearly articulated or clearly implied point of view which is separate from Frederic’s and which has the function of putting Frederic’s experience in perspective” (Fetterley 259). The only definite and safe conclusion readers can reach about Hemingway’s attitude towards women is that it is complex and ambivalent.

If one analyzes Catherine’s character, one can see many instances in which she is eager to please Frederic at any cost. Catherine can be described as a one dimensional figure and ultimately a deficient representation of women, according to today’s feminist standards. Catherine engages in compulsive apologizing towards Frederic, and willingly abdicates what little self she has left to give herself completely over to his desires. Catherine’s acquiescent behavior can be witnessed in many instances. In fact, even when Catherine is in the hospital in labor, she still feels the need to keep reassuring Frederic that she will be thin again, “I know I’m not fun for you, darling. I’m like a big flour-

barrel...I am just something very ungainly that you've married" (Hemingway 309). Not even the stress of a pregnancy and labor inhibit Catherine from apologizing for her appearance. She continues to repeatedly put herself down and tries to reassure Henry by stating "But I will be thin again, darling" (Hemingway 309). She is worried that the pregnancy is causing her beautiful appearance to diminish; she is unable to imagine any other reason why Henry would want to be with her besides aesthetics: "I was afraid because I'm big now that maybe I was a bore to you" (Hemingway 298). Why does Hemingway consciously create a character that is incessantly apologetic on behalf of her appearance? Indeed, Hemingway places a prodigious emphasis on Catherine in believing her physical appearance and desirability is Frederic's ultimate priority in being with her, overlooking that perhaps Frederic may love her for deeper, genuine reasons as well.

However, one can sympathize with Catherine's position to hold on to her lover, as her beauty is sufficient enough to gain Henry's love to begin with: "Frederic would never have fallen in love with Catherine if she were not beautiful" (Fetterley 265). Catherine has no concrete opinions of herself; her desires are actually Henry's desires. She refuses to adhere to any structure of formal religion, except for her love for Frederic Henry, which serves as the constant factor around which she organizes her life: "I haven't any religion... You're my religion" (Hemingway 116). Similarly, when Frederic asks Catherine when she is about to die if she wants him to "get a priest or anyone" to see her, her response is "Just you" (Hemingway 330). In her love for Frederic Henry, Catherine goes so far as to displace the devotion one would have for a religious deity to a human one. Catherine's character is static from the moment he meets her. One can view Hemingway as creating the ideal woman, armed with the traits he personally prefers,

thinking it would provide for a successful relationship. Catherine is fully aware of the horror from the war in her occupation as a nurse. She is also experienced in love and loss, after experiencing the death of her fiancé. She is compliant with Frederic's wishes, lacking any concrete personality traits. Catherine constructs a model of constancy which differs from the conventional ideals of her time. She is a modern woman who has rejected traditional values concerning love and marriage. Catherine must maintain a pretense in order to uphold her model of constancy. Even though she does not adhere to traditional societal customs including marriage, she still fits the yielding traditional role of womanhood by devoting herself to Henry, while Henry occupies a traditional patriarchal role.

Catherine can easily be understood solely as a sexual object for Henry. Women's sexuality is an integral component during the Great War, as well as involved in the strong concept of male camaraderie. Hemingway portrays Catherine and other females as unable to pose any real threat to the deeper, more idyllic love between men, which serves as the heart of man's survival during war. However, those who are critical of Catherine's role have also forgotten that she is a function of an environment engaging in war. It is not certain whether or not Catherine is rejecting traditional norms to accommodate herself in an erratic time of the war, or if Catherine would have proceeded to do so in any circumstance. However upon doing so during the war, role playing could be a technique to escape the realization of the difficulties during wartime. Catherine seems to be renouncing her feelings and opinions in order to feel numb, experiencing neither pain nor joy as a result of the loss of her fiancé. Catherine has experienced anguish over the loss of her fiancé. Out of this deep agony, Catherine may be abandoning all of her hopes, dreams

and emotions as a result of her severe depression. In an effort to desensitize herself from the pain which life and the world can bring, Catherine retreats from her pain into her own private world she has constructed. This includes the pretense Catherine hides behind in order to maintain a shield of constancy. Moreover, the lack of sentiment readers notice is a fundamental part of Catherine's defense mechanism, providing her with a means to safeguard her from any additional grief. The private world she has constructed for herself is in fact designed for her to achieve a limited autonomy. Rather, one can simultaneously argue that Catherine's fixed temperament, in addition to her refusal to fully submerge her heart and mind into human relationships, is not a sign of her compliance, but it is in fact a sign of her will power. Catherine is determined to forge an existence that interacts only on the surface, never again having to delve into deeper emotions and thought; in turn preventing her world from ever being shattered again. It is Catherine's strength and will power in pursuing an existence of emotional detachment that can strongly counter any critic's argument, that Hemingway has merely constructed a meek and feeble figment of his imagination.

Most feminists would be quick to judge Hemingway as being primarily interested in the experiences of men, and male gendered experiences including war, where few women of his generation would have been able to share. They would also recognize that most of his literary models were male (Tyler 153). However, one must not forget his informal apprenticeship with Gertrude Stein, which can lead one to believe that Hemingway was not opposed to women, but also that he looked up to, appreciated and learned from at least some women writers. Stein had a great influence on Hemingway's work as his mentor, and upon the birth of his son he asked her to be the godmother of his

child. Stein introduced him to the various other young and newly rising influential artists and writers of the time. Hemingway eventually withdrew from Stein's influence and their relationship deteriorated. Despite their quarrel, Hemingway's close relationship with Stein at one time is still important for readers and critics alike to recognize. It allows Hemingway to be viewed as someone other than a chauvinist, as some feminists have depicted; someone who did more than just depict women such as Catherine Barkley, as solely serving the needs of men.

However, any reader can argue that Hemingway may be depicting his idyllic fantasy through Catherine Barkley. He creates a beautiful, obedient and compliant woman, represented in Catherine. She is constructed in order to satisfy a dream of his. However, the problem many readers have with taking Catherine seriously, especially in a modern, advanced democratic climate which is seen in many societies today, is that it is difficult to witness the subordination of an individual in an intimate relationship as a symbol of maturity. Rather than being respected for her knowledge and clear eyed pragmatism, characteristics Barkley certainly encompasses, she has been perceived as an absent character because she has chosen to define herself solely in terms of her relationship with Henry: "There isn't any me anymore. Just what you want... You're my religion. You're all I've got" (Hemingway 296).

The notion of Catherine defining herself in terms of her relationship also relates to Catherine being seen solely as a sex object. Catherine and Frederic frequently engage in sexual relations, despite being outside of the institution of marriage. Catherine does not sleep with her fiancé, whom she loved dearly and ended up dying in the war, a tragic event she seems to blame herself for. Catherine tells Frederic:

You see I didn't care about the other thing and he could have had it all. He could have had anything he wanted if I would have known. I would have married him or anything. I know all about it now. But then he wanted to go to war and I didn't know...I didn't know about anything then. I thought it would be worse for him. I thought perhaps he couldn't stand it and then of course he was killed and that was the end of it (Hemingway 19).

Catherine's feelings for guilt stem from not bedding the one man she truly loved. She is traumatized by her loss, and it is only after losing the love of her life that Catherine chooses a different approach in her relationship with Frederic. It is perfectly understandable why Catherine thinks of her decision as an error, which haunts her even in her relationship with Frederic Henry. Through her relationship with Henry, Catherine is engaging in an effort to resurrect her lost love. Catherine can be understood for engaging in sexual relations with Frederic not only numb the pain of her fiancé's death, but also to make up for not engaging in relations with her fiancé. During WWI, couples had to face the compromising reality of having to weigh their traditions and morality against the very real possibility that they may never see each other again (Moddelmog 4). In just a moment's notice, any woman in Catherine's position can be confronted with the tragic circumstances of losing their love. Therefore, readers are able to sympathize with Catherine's current station.

The lesson Catherine learns from her dead fiancé is not simply that of living in the moment, but perhaps of allowing herself to engage in her own sexual desires; if not only to satisfy herself, then to at least satisfy Frederic. Catherine refused to marry her fiancé, refused to give herself to him sexually, until it was too late and he died from the war. She

naively assumed that they had all of the time in the world, but she had failed to realize they did not because of the war. Catherine does not want to commit the same mistake she once made now with Henry, who could lose his life serving the war as her fiancé did. It is the tragic consequences of the war, in addition to the loss of her fiancé, which leaves Catherine feeling she has nothing else to lose. Expressing her love for Frederic has never become such a matter of importance to Catherine, and never would have if it were not for her past experiences, and the current circumstances she is in. Catherine is faced with the grueling reality that Frederic Henry, like her fiancé, could be taken away from her at any moment as a result from the cost of war.

In addition, Catherine points out that if she and Frederic were actually to marry, they would not be allowed to live as a couple would in a traditional marriage, but they would be forced to separate (Hemingway 114). Catherine reveals this fact because according to certain rules and conducts during wartime, a woman could not be both nurse and wife to her husband serving in the war. Thus ironically, in Catherine and Frederic's circumstance, marriage is not even a matter to consider if these two lovers are determined to remain together (Moddelmog 4). Frederic and Catherine's contemplation of whether or not they should become slaves to the pervasive norms of society, reveals the prodigious rift between the conventional and unconventional ideals in relation to Hemingway's portrayal of love in the time of war. Many readers, especially at the time of the novel's release, including those who were not in the position of having an affair during a time of war, have found Catherine and Frederic's relationship to be unorthodox, unconventional, and immoral. Ironically, despite the disapproval concerning their relationship, staying

unmarried while serving in the war is the only way for Catherine and Frederic to stay truly committed to each other.

Readers and critics who dismiss Catherine as an integral character in the novel do so because they believe that Catherine does not act for herself, but only does so in terms to save Frederic from any responsibility and commitment. Critics and Feminists alike believe that it is Catherine who can be understood as having created the majority of the involvement between her and Frederic. Readers must consider that it is Catherine that constructs her encounter with Henry by engaging in what begins as a game of role playing. It can be understood that Catherine is the first to define the two as in a relationship, and does so almost immediately. Upon Catherine and Henry's first encounter alone the day after they meet, Henry "kissed her hard and held her tight....and then she was crying on my shoulder. 'Oh Darling you will be good to me wont you?'" (Hemingway 27). After this remark, Henry thinks "What the hell" to himself, clearly marking the confusion and absurdity he thinks of the situation. Henry meets Catherine only twenty four hours prior to this remark, upon which she takes control and starts addressing him as darling. Readers can see a grieving individual, who in anguish tries to reenact the past. Even though Catherine is crying because of the loss of her fiancé, she still continues the tactic of role playing with Henry. Frederic Henry is initially unacquainted with Catherine's emotional games and dismisses them as "nonsense" (Hemingway 126). Catherine later states that "I was a little crazy. But I wasn't crazy in any complicated manner" (Hemingway 154). Catherine's condition is that she sees her dead fiancé in all that surrounds her; and she most certainly she sees him in the face of the young ambulance driver, Frederic Henry.

Henry's initial narration reflects his inability to recognize or empathize with the terrible grief which is accompanied by the loss of one's love. When the novel ends, he is devastated just as Catherine is at the beginning of their affair. One can argue that Frederic is devastated even more so, as a result of losing not only a lover, but a child as well. As a result of his relationship with Catherine, Frederic has perhaps inadvertently learned from Catherine how to cope with trauma with courage, bravery, and somewhat peacefully just as she did with him to heal the pain from the loss of her fiancé. Therefore, Catherine is by no means an artistic failure on Hemingway's part: "In spite of her apparent submissiveness and self abnegation, she is not the adolescent male fantasy that so many critics have found her to be (Tyler 153)." Instead, in an interpretation most fully developed by Ernest Lockridge, she elaborates:

Hemingway does not have Catherine abnegate herself to Frederic Henry; rather she abnegates herself, when she does so, to an idea in her head. Motivated by the agonizing grief and loss that she still feels after a year of mourning, Catherine Barkley is acting out through the narrator a one sided, therapeutic game of "pretend"... through willed, deliberate projection upon the narrator, Frederic Henry, Catherine has temporarily resurrected her fiancé of eight years, blown "all to bits" on the Somme (173-174).

Catherine chose, while reliving her trauma through Frederic Henry, to relieve her pain in a constructive manner rather than in a destructive manner. Catherine is constructive in trying to give Frederic all that she denied her fiancé, rather than trying to inflict all of the pain she has suffered as a result of her loss on Frederic. She is also constructive in the manner of role playing which she chooses in dealing with her pain.

In a reading by Sandra Spanier named “Catherine Barkley and the Hemingway code: Ritual and Survival in *A Farewell to Arms*” she argues that Catherine Barkley is not what feminists describe as a degradation of women. She has been consistently attacked, berated and dismissed for her simplistic nature. However, Spanier states that Catherine Barkley serves as the opposite, and is actually the “code hero” of the novel. Ironically, it is interesting that the code hero usually is a simple character, the very quality Catherine has been attacked for:

As much victim of the war as her boy who was killed, her ideals shattered and her psyche scarred in confrontation with a chaotic and hostile universe, Catherine refuses to be helpless. She pulls herself together with dignity and grace, defines the limits of her own existence, and scrupulously acts her part, preferring romance to the theater of the absurd. By imposing an order on experience, she gains a limited autonomy, as much control over her own destiny as a human being in Hemingway’s world can hope to have. From her example, Frederic Henry learns how to live in it too. (Spanier 147-148).

It is through the act of role playing with Frederic that Catherine is able to overcome her pain from losing her fiancé. Catherine can be perceived as an example to follow, instead of a lackluster figure demeaning to women, because she finds a positive nondestructive means in order to master her trauma. Moreover, this nondestructive means of expression is also perhaps a reflection of not only Catherine, but of Frederic Henry and ultimately, Ernest Hemingway. Both Henry’s narrative and Hemingway’s novel is just another means of working through their grief; Frederic experiences grief from losing Catherine, and Hemingway experiences his own grief from his past relationships with

women, most importantly with Agnes von Kurowsky. The novel becomes a testament of Frederic's, and ultimately Hemingway's recovery. Like Catherine and Frederic, Hemingway has obtained wounds of his own and has dealt with them by "returning compulsively to the scenes of his injuries...It is not the trauma but the use to which he put it that counts; he harnessed it, and transformed it into art" (Spanier 171). All three overcome their grief from the healing provided by the act of role playing, and ultimately literary expression. Moreover, *A Farewell to Arms* serves to testify to the way in which the art of literature can provide a cathartic means to relieve human anguish.

After their first encounter, it is probable that Frederic was probably not looking to pursue a relationship with Catherine. Instead, because of the context of the war, Frederic may have only been searching for someone to engage in his sexual escapades with. Although they are not in love at this point, Catherine initiates and persistently desires to engage in the act of role playing, a game which serves to take her mind away from the pain of her loss. By initiating the game so quickly upon meeting, Catherine allows Henry to participate in a game based on false pretenses, voiding him from feeling any real responsibility. She proceeds by showing up to the hospital Henry is stationed in Milan, where soon after he falls in love with her. In addition, Catherine also takes full responsibility for her pregnancy, deciding where and how she will have her baby. When Catherine passes away, she yet again liberates Frederic of any real responsibility as she, with the aid of certain "ill-defined cosmic forces," (Fetterley 70) take her baby as well.

However, in light of the feminist approach in analyzing the novel, Catherine's death and the consequent destruction of the couple's love can serve as proof of Hemingway's misogyny. The very conclusion of *A Farewell to Arms* can reflect

Hemingway's own hostile nature towards women. Hemingway may be comfortable dealing primarily with male relationships as a result of his own failed relationships with women. Had Catherine lived, in some way she may have turned out to be a disappointment: "Hell I love you enough now. What do you want to do Ruin me?" Yes, I want to ruin you." Good. That's what I want too" (Hemingway 305). It seems as if both characters desire a covert mutual destruction of each other. If she had lived, their relationship somehow could have failed to last, the heartrending fate of all of Hemingway's romantic relationships. Perhaps it is Catherine's friend Ferguson's whose words offer the most accurate and pragmatic assessment of their relationship: "You'll die then. Fight or die. That's what people do. They don't marry" (Hemingway 108).

Hemingway may also have foreshadowed Catherine's death. He conveys the feeling of a meaningless, insensible and unfair universe in Frederic's musings on how he had once burnt a log full of ants. Frederic observes, like an unmoved God, their frantic efforts to escape. Hemingway portrays that perhaps man is ultimately doomed to the same sort of meaningless death as the ants. "You always feel trapped biologically," says Frederic to Catherine (Hemingway 139). Ironically, to underline the point that Catherine herself dies in an equally gratuitous manner, for another biological reason resulting from childbirth. Frederic reflects:

If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of

these you can be sure that it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry (Hemingway 249).

Hemingway may have been alluding to Catherine's death, by including qualities that describe her nature, "the very good and the very gentle and the very brave." Readers can later attest Henry's statement to the foreshadowing of Catherine's death. Through all of her suffering, Catherine is still able to persevere. However, like Catherine "those that will not break it kills." In addition, Catherine previously states that "The brave dies perhaps two thousand deaths if he's intelligent. He simply doesn't mention them" (Hemingway 140). For enduring the pain she has, Catherine is part of the gentle, brave and kind, bearing the loss of her fiancé courageously and almost silently.

The disposition of every female character Hemingway portrays in *A Farewell to Arms* can be a result of the immense hostility Hemingway possesses towards women as a result of the failed relationship with his own wartime and first love, Agnes von Kurowsky. In many ways, for Hemingway, art imitates life. Not only is Barkley a partial representation of Kurowsky, but Hemingway uses a metaphor as a vehicle to do so. Hemingway retells his own personal story, but he does so metaphorically through the characters of Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley. Retelling his personal story through a metaphor is important. It provides Hemingway with a certain distance which allows him the creative space to alter certain details, events and the outcome of his own personal experience, prodigiously blurring the line between truth and fiction.

Kurowsky served as a nurse in a American Red Cross hospital in Milan during World War I. Serving as an ambulance driver in Italy during the war, an eighteen year old Hemingway at the time was taken to the same Milan hospital after an explosion badly

injured his leg, similar to the circumstances read with Frederic in *A Farewell to Arms*. It is during this time that Hemingway meets Kurowsky, the twenty-six year old nurse who cares for Hemingway as he recuperates. Hemingway stated he was madly in love with Kurowsky. However, later in a letter to Hemingway, Kurowsky states “I know that I am still very fond of you, but, it is more as a mother than as a sweetheart” (Comley and Scholes 35). Hemingway longed to marry the nurse, but Kurowsky broke it off with Hemingway in the letter, for reasons including their age difference and her belief that Hemingway was immature. In addition, Kurowsky informed Hemingway that she was in love with someone else. Despite Agnes’ claim that she made a mistake and knew her relations with a young Ernest Hemingway were bound for failure, Hemingway tells a different story. In Henry Villard’s and James Nagel’s *Hemingway in Love and War: The lost Diary of Agnes von Kurowsky, Her Letters, and Correspondence of Ernest Hemingway* they note that:

Notwithstanding her attempt to play down the affair, there is no question in my mind that Agnes was strongly drawn to Hemingway...and that he thought...he was going to marry her after the war...Ernie took his dismissal very hard...Hemingway wrote bitterly that he had hoped Agnes would stumble and break all her front teeth when she stepped off the boat in New York. And when the first movie version of *A Farewell to Arms* appeared in 1932, starring Helen Hayes and Gary Cooper in the saccharine Hollywood manner, an angered Hemingway was said to have told a reporter for the *Arkansas Democrat*: ‘I did not intend a happy ending’ ...I had no doubt that the major contribution [to the characterization of Catherine] was that made by Agnes...Agnes might not have

been her precise counterpoint, but without Agnes there would have been no Catherine (44).

It is unknown what Hemingway's response to Agnes' letter was, but in a June 1919 letter to his friend Howell Jenkins, Hemingway wrote: "I loved her once and then she gyped me. And I don't blame her. But I set out to cauterize out her memory and I burnt it out with a course of booze and other women and now it's gone" (Baker 25). It is no surprise that Hemingway displays an underlying tragedy within the relationship between Frederic and Catherine by using the context of the war. The enemy is not only one which occupies a physical visible form, but it is within, the one you sleep with, and out in the universe, even the universe itself. To portray this, Catherine's death becomes an integral element for Hemingway to articulate his tragic vision that eventually, in some way shape or form, the world will break everyone.

Moreover, Catherine's death has not been accepted easily by some, being a target of feminist critics, in addition to her role in conjunction with Frederic's. The ultimate repression of Hemingway's own painful experience with Kurowsky comes in the form of Catherine's death. Hemingway's ambivalence towards women is reflected through Catherine's character. Hemingway's ambivalence does not waver in the district between love and loss, or even between immature and mature affection, but rather between the negative depictions of idealization and objectification. Judith Fetterley questions why it is that novels with similar themes to Hemingway's "so often depends on the death of the woman and so rarely on the death of a man" (Fetterley 255). In addition to the idealization of Catherine as a submissive and obedient woman, which she strongly reflects, she states that there "is a hostility whose full measure can be taken from the fact

that Catherine dies and dies because she is a woman” (Fetterley 256). Fetterley’s argument contains the idea that readers feel grief from Catherine’s death not for her own outcome, but rather for Frederic’s loss; because it is the male’s life that supersedes the females in terms of relevance. As a result from the grief Hemingway feels from losing Kurowsky, his image of women is reflected through Catherine’s death, and is “clear and simple: the only good woman is a dead one, and even then there are questions” (Fetterley 71). For many readers who are unhappy with the role of Catherine, their sentiment is further exasperated knowing her death and overall disposition results may from Hemingway’s rising hostility towards women.

However, Catherine’s perception may be either blinded by love, or she is merely giving up her convictions as a result of the despair she feels from the death of her fiancé. In either case, it is interesting to employ a feminist approach by analyzing possible views of Henry through the eyes of several of the women in *A Farewell to Arms*. From a feminist lens, one can attest Frederic Henry’s outlook towards women as hostile, in addition to patronizing. Hemingway may have taken the soul shattering figure of his own romantic life, and translates her into the perfect submissive mistress in *A Farewell to Arms*. In Hemingway’s reality, the only women that exist are those who destroy men, while fictional prototypical women such as Catherine remain only a figment of his imagination. In addition to Catherine, Henry has a series of interactions with various other women. These women include the nurses in the hospital where Catherine gave birth, Miss Van Campen, and the head nurse of the hospital where Catherine first works. Ironically, all of these women hold positions of some authority. To many readers, Henry’s hostility may be ambiguous and open to question, although there is explicit

evidence of hostility in his treatment, at least towards these women. For example, towards the end of the novel, Henry tells the nurses “you get out,” and “the other one too,” pushing them out of the room (Hemingway 332). One can easily argue that Henry is devastated over the death of Catherine and is aggressive from his state of distress. However, one can also disagree, and elaborate that in his mind these women appear as “smug, self righteous, critical, anti sexual, and sadistic, and it is expressed by the nature of his reactions to them” (Fetterley 263). Hemingway’s attitude towards the other women demonstrates his split attitude and resentment towards women after his affair with Kurowsky, easily perceived as so in *A Farewell to Arms*.

A crucial scene occurs when Henry is searching for Catherine in the first hospital she works in, requesting her whereabouts from the head nurse. The head nurse proceeds to patronize Frederic by stating “there’s a war on, you know” (Hemingway 22). A feminist critique would describe Henry as a misogynistic, egocentric, insensitive, non-combatant who expects to get his pleasure while other men are dying. As for Miss Van Campen, their dislike for each other is immediately evident. Henry denies her any possibility of authority or power, which would debase his role in comparison to hers, a direct result from his chauvinistic attitude. Women like Miss Van Campen serve as a threat to men of Henry’s stature, because she is fearless in challenging his incompetence. Miss Van Campen views Henry as domineering and rude, and considers Henry morally inferior when compared to herself. From Miss Van Campen’s comment, she is clearly angered at Henry’s disregard for anyone else in a chaotic time of war. Miss Van Campen’s view of Henry is that he is a selfish egotist who does not care about the war, and only cares about his sexual rendezvous with Catherine. One can support this view of

Henry when he is injured in the hospital. In order to be with him, Catherine comes to work in the hospital where Henry is a patient in. Catherine is “greatly liked by the nurses because she would do the night duty indefinitely” (Hemingway 108). Of course for Henry, this is convenient since it means she will be available at all hours of the day for his needs. In addition, Catherine can take care of his needs at night as well while she is on duty. One can only imagine how feminist critics must gasp in disgust at the thought of Henry taking time to rest all throughout the day while Catherine works tirelessly. Henry selfishly never inquires if Catherine is exhausted from her night shift duty, or her duty to “play” with him. It is only when Catherine’s friend Ferguson points out that she is exhausted that he puts his own desires aside, finally allowing Catherine some time to rest.

However, Hemingway can be viewed as reflecting the sentiment of women in his time, critiquing society’s misogynistic view on women, showing growth and progression in Frederic Henry’s character, or a combination of all of these. This is evident because critics began to change their earlier positions on Frederic and Catherine’s characterization. This rethinking sees Catherine as a strong female presence in *A Farewell to Arms*, and Frederic as her equal, not her superior. One example of this idea is when Catherine is conversing with Henry about cutting her hair short: “Let it grow longer and I could cut mine and we’d be just alike...It might be nice short. Then we’d both be alike. Oh, darling, I want you so much I want to be you too” (Hemingway 229). Henry replies to her by saying “You are. We’re the same one” (Hemingway 229). Catherine later states “I want us to be all mixed up” (Hemingway 229). While initially, Frederic preoccupies himself with matters of war, including his post, his friendships with Rinaldi and the priest, his injury, and his desertion, he later becomes increasingly

consumed by his feelings for Catherine. Frederic echoes the sentiment again by telling Catherine “Now if you aren’t with me I haven’t a thing in the world,” later adding I’m just so in love with you that there isn’t anything else (Hemingway 257). While feminist critics can analyze Catherine’s desire to be Henry too, arguing she wants to lose her own identity and be consumed by her feelings for Henry, others can find in the same lines that she yearns to be equal to Frederic as well.

Towards the end of *A Farewell to Arms*, through Frederic’s narrative, amid an idyllic existence together, both Catherine and Frederic function as one, incapable of being separated or alone. He tells Catherine that “I’m no good when you’re not there. I haven’t any life at all anymore” (Hemingway 300) crystallizing this position. In Frederic’s narrative, readers can see the extent to which loving Catherine has shaped his own character and values. The reader is willing to accept much of Frederic’s knowledge because he has been portrayed as an insider who understands the territory. Yet Frederic is aware of the physical aspects of the novel, while Catherine is aware of the emotional territory. Unlike Frederic, Catherine has been in love during the war before. Her emotional intelligence and maturity establishes her credibility as Frederic’s mentor in matters of psychological survival during wartime. Her mentality of detachment and numbness may be the key in order to come out of the war as alive as one can, that is if only one is not completely emotionally distraught already. Yet then why is it that Catherine, the only character aside from Frederic who inhabits the novel from beginning to end, is so consistently ignored as having any sort of significant influence? Hemingway could have revealed his idea of a strong, levelheaded heroine through a female, in the character of Catherine Barkley. Yet, Catherine’s character has been under

fire by feminist critics for generations; claiming that she has been dismissed by Hemingway and others as an uninspiring character because of her simplistic nature.

However, Catherine and Henry become reliant on each other. Frederic admits to both himself and to Catherine that she has a powerful hold over him, although she may be unaware of just how skillfully she leads him through much of their relationship. Moreover, her guidance is not suggesting that Catherine is manipulative. Rather her words, gestures and actions resonate with Frederic. It is then that their relationship seems balanced, when both Catherine and Henry are equally engrossed with each other and have a mutual respect and love for each other. In a natural, soft and caring manner, Catherine educates him about love. In this manner, Catherine can be understood as sympathetic, independent, intelligent, motivated and caring. This new perspective can also explain the evolution of Frederic's masculinity, including the idea that Frederic has grown from having a sexist perception of women, to a man who displays great love and admiration for his female counterpart. As previously mentioned, Frederic sees women as "smug, self righteous, critical, anti sexual, and sadistic," and it can be difficult to view many of Hemingway's female characters as being far from this description. However, this could be because Fetterley factors in many of Frederic's encounters with the nurses in Milan, many of which occur before his love for Catherine has the effect of transforming him.

Yet Henry's treatment of other women reflects Hemingway's dissatisfaction with gender identities; it also attaches itself with ideas of gender transgressions and the reversals of traditional male and female roles. When Catherine tells Henry that "We live in a country where nothing makes any difference," (Hemingway 303) it can be

understood as Hemingway's awareness of the difficulty involved in reaching the idealized level of equality in gender identity. It can also reveal Catherine's sense of defeat in the fight for gender equality, hence her need to play on her more feminine and docile qualities. The couple's escape to Switzerland is also a haven for them to escape the conventional rules and identities which are unavoidable in their current surroundings. When Catherine decides that after the baby is born, she is going to cut her hair and "be a fine new and different girl for you," (Hemingway 304) Frederic agrees "it would be exciting" (Hemingway 304). When Catherine happily predicts that he'll fall in love with her all over again, he replies that he loves her enough now. Clearly, Catherine is experimenting with the gender constructs of the time by proposing to cut her hair, especially during Hemingway's time in society, short hair was more appropriate for men and might even be read as a sign of lesbianism, while long hair is viewed as desirable for women:

Hair, in the Hemingway text, functions as a visible sign of sexual transgression, a public challenge to public notions of sexual propriety that are both fragile and dangerously powerful - especially for those who have internalized them to the point of self-demonization for transgressions (Comley and Scholes 65).

The couple is crossing the lines of conventional gender and sexual expectations, desiring to occupy a more contemporary position on the matter. Thus, their desire is not only fueled by their physical or mental attraction to each other, but through the pursuit of equal gender and sexual roles through the desire to have the other and be the other. Catherine states that she wants Frederic so much she wants to be him, and Frederic

concurr in stating that they are the same one. She desires him while also being him; he is a part of her while also desiring her.

One reason for Hemingway's popularity is that his work can be interpreted in several different ways. Readers know that from "the sheer number of such allusions, and the obviousness of many, suggest that they constitute deliberate signals to the reader of the underlying thrust of the book" (Tyler 152). This notion can apply to the homoerotic undertones in *A Farewell to Arms*, which many say the novel possesses. In Hemingway's work, it seems that the hero usually has one serious relationship with a woman, but there are always more men involved. However, in a wartime novel such as *A Farewell to Arms*, naturally in its time frame, one would expect that there would be a wide gamut of male characters. The reason for Hemingway's need for the context of his novels to be widely male dominated is not certain, however there is always a cadre of men who instantaneously "befriend, admire, or what to do anything for the Hemingway hero" (Mellow 379). As it pertains to sexual and gender expectations, the sexual innuendos stand out as a result of Hemingway's deliberate action to include them after an editor's note suggested to remove them.

Aside from Catherine, Frederic has two other important relationships, with an unnamed priest from the Abruzzi and Rinaldi, the Italian doctor and Frederic's roommate. These men serve as Frederic's two principal male friends. At first glance, it seems that both characters truly care about their friendship with Henry, as Hemingway does not overdo the underlying sexual symbolism. However, upon taking a closer look, one can detect homoerotic tendencies in their attachments to Frederic and in his to both of the men. The two men are representatives of a sacred and profane love. Hemingway

deliberately adds the detail concerning Rinaldi's suspicions that the priest and Frederic are "a little that way" (Hemingway 65). Hemingway stood by his decision to not remove this remark when editors questioned the statement, proving his homoerotic insinuation was deliberately kept there (Hemingway, 11 March 1929; *The Only Thing That Counts* 94-96).

One can observe Rinaldi's constant fixation with calling Henry "baby." In addition, Rinaldi is constantly trying to obtain a kiss from Frederic. One might interpret Rinaldi's behavior as mere childish teasing, yet Frederic continually pushes Rinaldi away rejecting those attempts. After one of the instances where Frederic denies Rinaldi's kiss, Rinaldi responds to his rejection with, "I won't kiss you if you don't want. I'll send your English girl," (Hemingway 67) implying that he would prefer Catherine because she could better serve his needs rather than Rinaldi. One can interpret Rinaldi's remark out of feelings of jealousy over Frederic's relationship with Catherine; Henry would rather prefer her over Rinaldi. However, the priest and Rinaldi may have been more experimental on Hemingway's part in pushing societal boundaries. Rinaldi's attempt to kiss Frederic represents more than childish teasing, it would have endangered the concept of heterosexual romance, defying the familiar categories of gender and sexuality of the time.

Especially in the context of a war, there is a greater emphasis placed on male camaraderie in literature. Male homosexuality becomes a central part of almost any work, and in most instances, stronger than heterosexuality or any discourse regarding women. It is debatable where these male bonds fall on the continuum of male relationships, especially under the extreme conditions such as war. Can these bonds be classified as

comradeship, brotherhood or perhaps something more? In Santanu Das' *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature*, Das explains how during the war:

The norms of tactile contact between men changed profoundly. Mutilation and mortality, loneliness and boredom, the strain of constant bombardment, the breakdown of language and sense of alienation from home led to a new level of intimacy an intensity under which the carefully constructed mores of civilian society broke down (Das 111).

Aside from Catherine, women are either absent or secondary characters. For Rinaldi, the character of Catherine is seen as posing a threat to the purity of their male camaraderie or further, any possibility of a romantic relationship between the two men. Frederic's friendships with Rinaldi and the priest are interesting. Both characters are disillusioned with the war and society, and both seemingly fail to find satisfaction in their jobs as a result of the war. As a surgeon, Rinaldi helps his patients only to see them later killed in battle. The priest finds the soldiers too disheartened to help them past what they have experienced, and for this, he resents their abuse or rejection in his assistance: "In my country it is understood that a man may love God. It is not a dirty joke (Hemingway 71).

Confronted with characters such as the priest, and more importantly Rinaldi, readers must address the ambiguous sexuality and relations between men that would not occur during times of peace. Frederic is constantly read as rejecting Rinaldi's advances. However, despite resisting Rinaldi's attempts, it seems that at times, Henry does reciprocate the underlying homoeroticism to his friend as well. In fact, one erotically suggestive episode in *A Farewell to Arms* is when Frederic says: "I took off my tunic and shirt and washed it in the cold water in the basin. While I rubbed myself with a towel I

looked around the room and out the window and at Rinaldi lying with his eyes closed on the bed. He was good looking” (Hemingway 12). In an intimate moment with himself, Frederic takes the time to recognize Rinaldi, and perhaps his comment can be interpreted as recognizing that there is some attraction to him. Another ambiguous episode is when Frederic sleeps in Rinaldi’s bed, rather than his own. He never explains why, but the motive might be interpreted as his effort to experience a physical closeness to a man he loves and misses being around.

With these episodes, however, it is important to recognize the convoluted male relationships of friendship and intimacy during wartime. For many soldiers and volunteers depicted in World War I literature, life on the fronts during the war meant danger, displaying very few if any distractions from its horrors. Each comradeship serves as a divergence from the war’s daily atrocities, making life tolerable. Though the lack of women on the fronts leaves some men with the choice to turn to temporary forms of homosexuality:

“Male friendships often occupies a complex position in literary works, that ideas more than provide cover for homosexuality or sentimentalize adolescence, and that in the decades surrounding the First World War, the pressures on friendship increased, coming to the fore in a variety of historical contexts and for a variety of reasons. In the cultural settings of late-Victorian and early twentieth-century England, as in many literary works of these years, friendship took on a heightened and intensified importance, even as its place in person, social, and narrative desire seemed increasingly tenuous. Writers in this period emphasized both the value

and the fragility of male ties, developing images of men and masculinity that were at once haunting, beautiful, troubling, desperate, and self dramatizing” (Cole 2).

Though Frederic may not normally feel homoerotic sentiments towards Rinaldi, the context of the war may actually be conducive for him to. Before Catherine, the men only have each other to rely on, which may be the reason why these male relationships “took on a heightened and intensified importance.” Hemingway is either plainly suggesting an intimate relationship between the two, or a general depiction of heightened male bonds in literary works as a result of the First World War.

In addition to the sexual innuendos that can be read between Rinaldi and Henry, one can equally detect that the priest and Henry have several intimate and tender moments alone together. In fact, one can interpret Frederic’s encounters with the priest as encompassing more sexual tension than his interactions with Rinaldi. In the beginning of *A Farewell to Arms*, Henry disappoints the priest, who advises Henry to take his winter leave to visit the priest’s family in Abruzzi. However, Henry chooses to spend his time differently. Instead, Henry chooses to stay in the cities, where he spends “nights in bed, drunk, when you knew that that was all there was, and the strange excitement of waking and not knowing who it was with you, and the world all unreal in the dark” (Hemingway 13). Hemingway chooses a trip that is clearly a far cry from the request the priest had made of him earlier. Upon returning, Henry tries to console the priest for his decisions, assuring him that he had wanted to originally follow his suggestion and go to Abruzzi, but for some reason inexplicable reason had not. It is interesting that the priest would be so disappointed in Henry not choosing to visit his family in Abruzzi, especially since they had just met. However despite this, Henry describes that “we were still friends, with

many tastes alike, but with the difference between us. He had always known what I did not know and what, when I learned it, I was always able to forget. But I did not know that then, although I learned it later” (Hemingway 14). Henry states that “I had learned it later,” perhaps an implication that he was not aware of the priest's feelings initially, and perhaps, Henry's later, reciprocated feelings. However, Hemingway leaves the true nature of the information that was learned ambiguous. However, with the subtle nuances Hemingway provides throughout the entire texts, readers are left pondering that perhaps what the priest knew were his desires for homosexual love.

A particularly significant scene in Frederic's room dark room involves Frederic lying on a bed in the field hospital, stroking a blanket, while the priest sits on Frederic's cot and talks to him. Interestingly enough, Rinaldi is also eager to visit Henry, and pays him a visit before the priest. It seems that Hemingway makes a conscious decision to regularly pair Henry's scenes with the priest and Rinaldi, though readers are never definite as to why. Henry's discourse with the priest at one point revolves around the love of god: ““You do not love him at all?” he asked. ‘I am afraid of Him in the night sometimes.’ ‘You should love Him.’ ‘I don't love much.’ ‘Yes, You do. What you tell me about in the nights. That is not love. That is only passion and lust. When you love you wish to do things for. You wish to sacrifice for. You wish to serve.’ (Hemingway 72). Upon the priest's remark, Henry responds stating that he doesn't love, and the priest insists he will, and he will be happy. When Henry assures the priest that he has always been happy, the priest responds stating “It is another thing. You cannot know about it unless you have it” while Henry responds “Well if I ever get it I will tell you” (Hemingway 72). The priest's responses seem calculated and assertive for a soft spoken

man of God. They are often ambiguous in nature, as much of the subject matter is in Hemingway's work. One is only left to wonder why Hemingway would allow such room for deliberation over the possibilities of homoerotic tension between the male characters.

Moreover, while Henry and the priest are talking about loving God, Henry asks if it is similar to loving a woman, and the priest makes it a point by saying he has never loved any woman (Hemingway 72). Doing this he frequently touches Frederic, and even "patted his hand" several times (Hemingway 73). Additional scenes where the priest's gestures are physically ambiguous include when Henry describes meeting the priest after not seeing him for some time: "I stood up and we shook hands. He put his hand on my shoulder" (Hemingway 173). Another occasion is when the priest tells Henry that "it is very nice that you are back... he put his hand on my shoulder" (Hemingway 180). Even when the priest visits Frederic in the hospital, Frederic describes one of the scenes when "the orderly came down between the beds and stopped. Someone was with him. It was the priest. He stood there small, brown faced, and embarrassed" (Hemingway 180). Henry also describes that the priest "sat down in the chair that had been brought for Rinaldi and looked out of the window embarrassedly" (Hemingway 73). Suggestively, in both instances, Henry describes the priest as being embarrassed, which seems more like a more suitable response given by an awkward teenager with a crush rather than an adjective to describe a friend, even more importantly an adult priest.

The idea of erotic energy between Hemingway's characters of the same sex can be carried into the relationship between Helen Ferguson and Catherine Barkley as well. Catherine's only close relationship to anyone other than Frederic is with Helen Ferguson, her nursing colleague. Helen is Catherine's constant companion, even before Frederic

makes his way into her life. Hemingway reveals the two in various romantic settings throughout the first half of the novel. For instance, they are seen on a bench in a garden (Hemingway 25), in addition to the luxurious hotel in Stresa where Helen, for reasons one could justify result from her feelings for Catherine, reacts wildly to Frederic's unanticipated arrival. Ferguson is seemingly angry with Frederic because she believes he has ruined Catherine with "his sneaking Italian tricks" (Hemingway 246). In addition, in an effort which serves to only exasperate her feelings, Helen becomes even more distraught about Catherine leaving her: "I've always wanted to go to the Italian lakes and this is how it is," (Hemingway 248) she cries. However despite this homoerotic undertone, Frederic does not seem to detect that sexual jealousy might be the underlying motivation to these odd outbursts. Frederic expresses to Catherine that he doesn't think Helen "wants what we have" (Hemingway 257). Catherine puzzlingly responds, "You don't know much, darling, for such a wise boy" (Hemingway 257). This response reveals her superior understanding of the meaning of Helen's affection (Mandel 22). Or, the statement could simply be interpreted that Helen, does in fact desire the same affection that Catherine receives from Frederic, simply from a man of her own. It is highly probable that Helen has never professed her love for Catherine, and she may not have even necessarily recognized it or declared it to herself. However, from Helen's behavior, following Catherine from place to place, being so upset when their plans are interrupted, one can justify these as indications that, provided with the possibility, Ferguson would want exactly what Frederic has, a romantic relationship with Catherine (Mandel 22). Though their leave to Switzerland is a strategic move to avoid Frederic's arrest, Frederic and Catherine's escape to Switzerland is also an escape from the homoerotic desires

circulating in their same sex relationships with Ferguson, the priest and Rinaldi. The reclusiveness of their location allows for a more concentrated focus on their own heterosexual pairing, a focus originally blurred for them by occurrence of the ongoing war, in addition to the ambiguous same sex relationships which may not have been so in a time of peace.

Many questions concerning the nature of relationships and sexual identity remain unanswered. An essential question would be what the actual nature is behind both Rinaldi and the priest's relationship with Henry. It comes as no surprise in the context of Hemingway's time, the editors publishing the novel sought to eliminate parts of the novel which can be seen as homoerotic references. However, what is even more perplexing is that Hemingway included the homosexual overtones in the first place, firmly insisting for them not to be touched. Whether or not there is an actual attraction between Henry and any of the men, if the attraction is based off of the environment of the war, or if there is nothing behind their relationships, is a topic of heated discourse even today. One can also question whether or not it is Catherine Barkley who is intended to be the true heroine in *A Farewell to Arms*. Catherine's role has been categorized endlessly, from a "code heroine," a submissive male fantasy, a paranoid lover, a hysterical survivor or a mature teacher. Yet, despite the infinite classifications Catherine has been put in over time, her influence impacted Frederic's way of life, transforming his initial misogynistic nature to a more sensitive and nurturing one. Hemingway armed Catherine with the knowledge that Frederic Henry lacked. While feminist critiques would state otherwise, it is ultimately the work that must speak for itself. It is important to see that the essence of Hemingway's writing is timeless. Even though we will never know what Hemingway's

true intentions are, we can rely on the beauty of Hemingway's ambiguous language; this in effect leaves much to the reader's interpretation, allowing a different representation of the novel to form in each reader's mind. The simple sentences and incomplete descriptions free an individual's imagination and inspire each person to develop their own interpretation of the story; however, it is a wonder whether or not Hemingway was aware that the spark of such deliberation and confusion would be that which he created with the sway of his own pen.

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