

DIALOGICAL PLAY IN HEMINGWAY'S A FAREWELL TO ARMS

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Most critics of *A Farewell to Arms* describe the novel in ways that seem to disqualify it from status as an authentically dialogical text. Unlike the earlier *In Our Time* (1925) and *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) offers few speaking voices, ironies with clearer targets, an emphasis on concrete imagery rather than dialogue, and a sustained thematic bitterness that Carlos Baker calls "emotional commitment." Baker notes that by the time Hemingway sat to compose his second novel he had committed himself to a hardened attitude in which the courageous who commit themselves to playing life's risky games, such as loving wholly, will inevitably lose to the great opponent and inevitable victor, death. Baker also notes that the act of writing *The Sun Also Rises* seems to have "strengthened and consolidated Hemingway's powers and given him new insights into [his] method for controlling materials from below" (*Writer as Artist* 101), skills he had used to create the more craftsmanlike *A Farewell to Arms*. Similarly, Charles Fenton, in his *Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway*, sees Hemingway's early interest in qualities we would now call Bakhtinian or dialogical—"burlesque, mimicry, satire, and irony"—as an early stage in Hemingway's development toward a more moving poetics (81).

Many other critics agree. For Philip Young, Hemingway's early "conversational" prose becomes in *Farewell* "finished" (91). For Carlos Baker, "tragi-comic" work becomes "tragic" (*Writer as Artist* 96). For Sheldon Norman Grebstein, Jake Barnes's narration lacks the temporal distance that allows Frederic Henry to narrate "the sound of doom" (76). More recent readings find other causes for Hemingway's closed style with its persistent bitterness. Judith Fetterley views Hemingway's highly controlled style as a cover for his alleged misogyny. Millicent Bell finds evidence of Hemingway's self-fashioning in an effort to avoid memories of loss. All agree, however, that in *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway has adopted a more poetic

style and dominant mood that significantly close the text off from the heteroglot social world.

Daniel J. Schneider's reading is the most emphatic of those emphasizing *Farewell's* move away from irony, comedy, and diversity of characterization. In fact, Schneider's terms sound remarkably like Bakhtin's definition of monologism, discourse designed to reflect a fixed idea or relatively limited viewpoint on social reality. Schneider borrows Robert Penn Warren's distinction between "pure" poetry—"which seeks more or less systematically to exclude so-called 'unpoetic' elements from its hushed and hypnotic atmosphere"—and "impure" poetry—"which welcomes into itself such supposedly recalcitrant and inhospitable stuff as wit, cacophony, jagged rhythms, and intellectual debate." Hemingway's novels, Schneider argues, "are in spirit and in method closer to pure lyric than to epic; they "systematically exclude whatever threatens to interfere with the illusion of life beheld under the aspect of a single, dominant, all-pervasive mood or state of mind" (252).

This argument seems to apply poorly to either *In Our Time*, a collage of juxtaposed attitudes and varying speaking voices, or *The Sun Also Rises*, with its episodic structure and the verbal play of the bohemian characters in Jake Barnes's circle. However, Schneider's claim does seem to describe *A Farewell to Arms* rather well. It does seem true that "no characters or episodes [in the novel are] given freedom to develop emotions outside the dominant bitterness" (253). Even the greatest source of joy in the novel, Catherine's ecstatic love for Frederic Henry, is continually qualified by her (and seemingly Hemingway's) bitterness. After promising to love Henry in the rain, snow and hail, she admits she sees herself dead in the rain (126). The couple's carefree lovemaking leads to the "biological trap" of Catherine's pregnancy (137ff). And the happy times in Switzerland are qualified by the feeling that something was hurrying them and they "could not lose any time together" (311). Because this is a premonition of tragedy as well as an anticipation of Catherine's labor and delivery, we feel with Schneider the pervasive "dominant bitterness." Bakhtin's discussion of monological characteristics in literature comes to mind, especially the description of the dangers of an author's voice fusing with that of the hero, closing off free-standing ideas in favor of a central authorial idea (*Problems* 51ff).

In *A Farewell to Arms* we do find less of the linguistic play and double voicing that we find in Hemingway's earlier books. However, we also find, within a novel designed to be received as "pure poetry," a dialogical subtext. First, there is the ambiguity surrounding Henry's relationship to the world outside Catherine's arms—a theme handled brilliantly by Hemingway's own peculiar double-voicing, the distance he maintains between Henry's utterances and his own position. Particularly interesting is Henry's assertion after his plunge into the Tagliamento that any obligation to the Italian army had been washed away. Surely Henry owes nothing more to the bureaucratic organization whose leaders decided without valid reason to kill him. However, Henry doesn't simultaneously consider the positive things he is fleeing, including the masculine companionship he had enjoyed, the work he had tried to do well, and even the chance to lead other men. Somehow Henry's necessary flight to Switzerland comes to mean more to him, as though retreating with a lover to an eminently practical country means escaping unhappiness, frustration and death in all its forms, not just escaping from a proto-fascist death squad. One sign of Hemingway's dialogism then is evident in the guilt and uselessness Henry feels during the Switzerland episode. Second, there is the special role of Switzerland in this novel. As in the story from *In Our Time*, "Cross Country Snow," Switzerland becomes a utopia denied. In fact, images of the country open up a dialogue between utopia and the parody of utopia. Here Hemingway returns to the unanswerable question that closes *In Our Time*: When there are countries like Switzerland, aloof from world crises and eminently "practical" (as Frederic Henry observes after bribing the border police), attentive to the pleasures of its citizens and visitors, when happiness is so tantalizingly near, is it possible that there is no place in the world to be happy and well? As he had in his earlier works, Hemingway invites us to entertain two possibilities, two hard notions in never ending dialogue: that doom is inevitable and near; and that something like a conventional life can lead to years of contentment.

In 1956, E. M. Halliday called for more attention to irony and other discursive features of Hemingway's work:

Hemingway has used techniques of symbolism and techniques of irony and used them well; what we want in criticism is an even

view of his use of these and other artistic resources that does not exaggerate one at the expense of others. (69)

As if in answer to Halliday, recent critics of *A Farewell to Arms* have shifted attention from the novel's symbol system to Hemingway's ironic distance from his characters' discourse and choices. Especially promising are James Phelan's and Scott Donaldson's studies of the distance between Hemingway and his protagonist, Frederic Henry. Concentrating as I will on moments where Hemingway's double-voicing reveals Henry's self-deception—including the crucial killing of the deserting sergeant—Phelan and Donaldson lay the groundwork for my claim that the novel rests on strong dialogical features.

Donaldson's "Frederic Henry's Escape and the Pose of Passivity" argues that the Frederic Henry who flees the Austrian front is so consumed by guilt (presumably over his desertion and shooting of the sergeant) that he fools himself into thinking that others make the decisions that lead him out of uniform, up to Lake Maggiore, and across to Switzerland. Donaldson notes the moments where we know what Henry pretends not to—specifically where Henry pretends to have no plans for escape to Switzerland. For instance, even though Henry's friend Simmons has told him he can row across the lake from Stresa to "old Helvetia" (242), Henry pretends with both Catherine and the Isles Borromees barman that he doesn't know about even the possibility of escaping across Lake Maggiore. Donaldson's is a very convincing argument, but I'm interested in the deeper assumption on which it rests: that Hemingway carefully maintained the distance between himself and his character:

Hemingway was careful, in commenting on the novel, to refer to his protagonist as "the invented character," thus distinguishing between author and narrator. And he issued a further warning: that he was not to be held accountable for the "opinions" of his narrators. (108)

For Donaldson, the novel confirms Hemingway's statements about his distance from Henry. Hemingway and Henry are different as soldiers: "[Henry] is no Othello, nor even a Hemingway" (109). Additionally, Donaldson asserts, manuscript fragments deleted from

the novel show that Hemingway was interested in cutting material that seemed too close to his own thinking (109).

Donaldson's Frederic Henry thus remains callow throughout the experiences recounted in the novel, during the intervening time before he tells his story, and throughout the telling as well. Like Jake Barnes, he is likeable and deserving of sympathy--not simply an ironic cipher--and yet he remains permanently free of Hemingway's personal beliefs about courage and honor. This is also the conclusion reached by James Phelan in his essay, "Distance, Voice and Temporal Perspective in Frederic Henry's Narration: Successes, Problems and Paradox": "Perhaps because Frederic's [prose] style conforms so closely to our general notion of how Hemingway sounds, critics frequently do not inquire closely into the relations between author and narrator here. When we look closely, however, we can see that Hemingway is providing the ground for establishing a significant distance between himself and Frederic" (55).

Phelan's essay describes the distance in Bakhtinian terms, reaching in many cases conclusions I share. However, Phelan doesn't discuss metaparody, or the special kind of ambiguity I find in *A Farewell to Arms*. Therefore, it's necessary for me to describe Phelan's argument in some detail and to lay out our differences fairly carefully.

For Phelan, Frederic Henry and Hemingway each control a voice, a "combination of style, tone and values expressed in a discourse." At meaningful moments in the novel, the *distance* between these voices, a "function of the extent to which Hemingway endorses Frederic's understanding and judgements about the events he reports," becomes apparent. Thus, we have *double-voiced discourse*: "Frederic's voice is contained within--and its communication is thereby complicated by--Hemingway's" (53-4).

Phelan sees *A Farewell to Arms* opening with such a complication. Henry's elegant description of troop movements and the change of seasons outside his window conveys both Hemingway's negative judgement about the war (evident in the destruction of nature's cycle by troops) and Frederic's failure to make moral judgements about what he sees. This failure is most apparent in Henry's shocking report that "[the cholera] was checked and in the end only seven thousand died of it in the army." This statement, Phelan notes, is spoken in the voice of the military high command--

classic double-voicing of the kind Bakhtin finds in *Little Dorrit* ("Discourse in the Novel" 320ff). Henry is thus introduced "as someone whose values Hemingway questions rather than shares" (57).

This is a particularly poor illustration of a valid point. Hemingway does maintain some distance from Frederic Henry's understanding and judgments. In this cholera passage, however, it seems clear that Henry himself understands the irony of a phrase like "only seven thousand died of it." Henry's failure to judge a situation properly is more evident in his cynical initial attempt at seducing Catherine. As their developing relationship makes clear, Hemingway hopes for a more intense and spiritual union between lovers.

In Phelan's view, but not mine, Henry's voice eventually merges completely with Hemingway's. I agree that it is striking "how skillfully Hemingway gradually closes the distance between himself and Frederic" (59). Frederic Henry's early callowness, cynicism and manipulativeness, all apparent, for instance, in that first attempt to seduce Catherine, become sincerity and gentleness. Later, missing an opportunity to see Catherine at her villa-hospital Henry admits, "I had treated seeing Catherine very lightly, I had gotten somewhat drunk and had nearly forgotten to come but when I could not see her there I was feeling lonely and hollow" (41). During the Caporetto retreat his thoughts about Catherine are sexual but filled too with loving affection. As Phelan puts it, Henry has learned the "authorial norm" spoken by the priest: "When you love you wish to do things for. You wish to sacrifice for. You wish to serve" (72-3).

However, Hemingway maintains a subtle distance from Henry and from any other position that could become an "authorial norm". Even the priest's treatise on love is less an authorial norm than a position shown to be powerful and valid by some characters' statements and actions, and archaic by others'—a dialogical notion, in other words, felt as an authorial norm only because Hemingway has crafted the situations that allow us to make our own judgment. Phelan's reading (about which he confesses his own reservations—more on that below) depends on the premise that the war is unnatural, deplorable, fundamentally *wrong*, and that Henry's voice merges with Hemingway's when he realizes that. Yet this premise is troubling. While for Hemingway senseless death is wrong, war—even the First World War—is a complex matter. We need to

remember Jake Barnes's irritation that a conversation with a *poule* was about to lead to the conclusion that war "was in reality a calamity for civilization" (17). Jake and his author both agree that point doesn't need to be made. But Hemingway in no clear way shows that war is avoidable or that he would mandate pacifism or conscientious objection. In fact, Hemingway is interested in the soldierly valor of many of his characters, including Nick Adams, Harold Krebs and Frederic Henry, and valor would have little meaning in completely senseless wars. Only the very personal injustice facing Lieutenant Henry justifies for Hemingway (though not fully) Henry's flight to Switzerland. *A Farewell to Arms*, then, is not primarily a treatise on the superiority of love to war. Hemingway is after different prey: revealing the guilt that comes with making decisions in an ambiguous world, casting off unwanted beliefs and affiliations and taking on others that may or may not themselves endure.

As I see it, Frederic Henry's most important decision – to shoot the deserting sergeant during the retreat to Udine – has a metaparodic thrust. That is, it is impossible to judge for all time and for all people whether Henry has done the right thing. In order to convey the radical ambiguity of making such a decision, weighing group rights against human life, Hemingway offers two alternative readings for the episode, each potentially endlessly parodic of the other.

In reading one, Henry is justified in shooting the sergeant and sanctioning his execution. As Phelan observes, Frederic Henry and the sergeants are shown to hold differing values. Henry is dedicated to sharing food and helping those in need. He makes sure that his men are fed and rested. He feeds the young girls in his care and relieves their fears of sexual assault. Later, he gives them money and directs them to the relative safety of the retreat's main body. Meanwhile, the sergeants plunder private homes for more than the food and drink they need, eat without sharing with the others, and work for the common good only under duress. Eventually they will abandon the others. When Henry "drops" one sergeant and empties his clip shooting at the other, he is acting within a military code that he tries to preserve order and ensure that mutual interdependencies are properly maintained. After all, German/Austrian planes have been seen moving to bomb the retreat; the sergeants may be endangering

the lives of the others by failing to help them move toward Udine. In spite of Henry's apparent shock after the shootings, he has done what Krebs claimed to do in *In Our Time*: the one thing, the only thing for a man to do.

In reading two, Henry's shooting is justified by military law, but otherwise seen as an extreme measure under the circumstances. Phelan views Henry's act within what he sees as an authorial rejection of war's destructiveness: "Given Hemingway's attitudes about the war's destruction, we can infer that shooting to kill under these circumstances is clearly overdoing it" (64). Phelan's connection between Henry's shooting and "war's destructiveness" is unconvincing. If Henry can be said to be "overdoing it," it is because of the questionable military purpose in keeping the sergeants stranded with the others. It is true that the sergeants are disobeying sound orders and abandoning decent people, including two defenseless girls. But perhaps they have seen earlier than Henry that the ambulance is hopelessly stuck and that, as Aymo says, it is no use to try and free it (205). Aymo's reactions become important in other ways as well. Guileless, more thoughtful and caring than Bonello or Piani, Aymo is Henry's most trustworthy soldier. Henry thinks of the dead Aymo, "I had liked him as well as any one I ever knew" (214). It is notable then that Aymo does not join Bonello and Piani in congratulating Henry on his shooting. In fact, he asks Bonello sincerely what he will say in confession about executing a sergeant. When Bonello jokes, "I'll say, 'Bless me father, I killed a sergeant,'" Aymo laughs with the others. (Gallows humor is compelling.) But Aymo has treated the death with a seriousness we don't see in the others. He seems to feel with Henry the profundity of the death. "It was my fault," Henry muses. "I had led them up here. The sun was almost out from behind the clouds and the body of the sergeant lay beside the hedge" (205). Henry's concentration on the body of the dead man lends resonance to the wonderfully ambiguous, "It was my fault." He seems simultaneously to admit and resist the notion that he could have spared the sergeant's life.

The metaparodic interplay of these scenes from the retreat qualifies the overdetermined universe Frederic and Catherine talk about, and in my view places them in a world where decisions become more meaningful and difficult. Decisions mean now because it is not simply true, as Frederic Henry says after hearing his son was

stillborn, that "They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you. Or they killed you gratuitously like Aymo" (327). Henry's baseball metaphor breaks down when we realize that "they" don't make all the decisions; "we" make some too. Henry himself has caused the death of one man by making a choice. He has gotten Catherine pregnant by making a choice. He and Catherine choose the hospital in which she dies. Frederic even chooses to give Catherine more anaesthetic gas—much more—than her doctor recommends. Each of Frederic Henry's choices, including shooting the sergeant, escaping the battle police firing squad, and bedding Catherine without the precaution of a contraceptive, is defensible. What is interesting is the way the notion of choice is presented—focusing not on the correctness of any single decision but on the consequences and guilt that come with making choices in an ambiguous world.

This isn't to say that Hemingway feels no sympathy for Frederic Henry or that Hemingway would clearly have Henry choose differently in any situation. Yet Hemingway maintains his distance from Henry's voice even when Henry utters the authoritative, knowing positions in the final pages of the novel, the parables of the baseball game and the ants. Hemingway's purpose is not to ironize these parables, to approve by implication of some contrasting position. He seems to be after something more complex, the casting of philosophies into inconclusive dialogue.

How then do we read the second part of the novel, commencing with Frederic Henry's plunge into the Tagliamento? How do we judge Henry's decisions and the thinking on which he bases them?

Both Phelan's praise for Henry's flight from the war and Donaldson's criticisms of Henry's self-deception during this time are compelling. Perhaps, then, we should resist the urge to resolve Henry's ambiguity, instead focusing on the inconclusive dialogue between a reading of Henry as clear-sightedly competent or as self-deluded and evasive. Frederic Henry is one of Hemingway's most complex characters, his complexity belying the labels other characters try to attach to him. He isn't simply "all fire and smoke and nothing inside" (66) as Rinaldi says, not even before he falls in love with Catherine; his wish to feel, as the priest does, sacred respect or love for places and people is honest enough, just unfulfilled. Nor is he simply Rinaldi's "remorse boy" (168), unmanned by a loving

seriousness other men avoid; he and Catherine love adventurously and relatively equally, unencumbered by puritanical pieties about sexual conduct. He isn't simply Nurse Ferguson's "snake with an Italian uniform" (246); he doesn't "sneak off" and abandon Catherine as she prophesies, nor does he in any other clear way abuse Catherine's love. And yet he isn't a *medaglia d'argento* hero either (63); he suffers physical pain without excessive complaining but never acts as though his cause or comrades were worth as much as his life. Ultimately Frederic Henry is much more complex than any of these assessments, knowing and yet self-deceived, capable of acting decisively as he does in the Caporetto retreat, and of waffling as he does when he learns he is about to be arrested in Stressa.

In other words, he is more fully human than a character designed merely to illustrate a fixed idea, such as the inevitability of doom. The ambiguity of Henry's feelings and judgements remains in effect, if very quietly, even in the final lines of the novel:

But after I had got them out and shut the door and turned off the light it wasn't any good. It was like saying goodbye to a statue. After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain. (332)

This passage follows close after Henry's baseball and ant parables and epitomizes their message about the futility of resisting death. Additionally, it is possible to read Henry's emotional control as a sign of growth. Phelan does: "There is emotion in the reporting here, but it is emotion under control, the emotion of one who knows the painful truth, who is suffering from the knowledge and experience of that truth, but who is also moving beyond that knowledge and experience" (62). The passage's ambiguity gives me no reason to argue against Phelan, but I am also interested by Harold Bloom's alternative judgment: that Henry's stoicism doesn't feel "coherent" and that the passage is a "worn understatement" coming as it does after a "monotony" of similar understatements (4-5). Again we're presented with a striking choice between seeing Henry as wiser in his grief or simply unconvincing in his stoic understatement. Both arguments have been made convincingly. And again, rather than answering the compulsion to choose a correct view, we might view the passage's ambiguity as purposeful, a sign of Hemingway's great skill and of his

struggle through over thirty drafts to conclude the novel fittingly. This conclusion is fitting because it conveys the grief of inevitable loss. Yet, because Henry focuses on his own pain, this conclusion also gives us reason to doubt Henry's stoicism. Frederic Henry remains the complex character Hemingway needs to pose the unresolvable problem of acting well in an ambiguous, rather than simply malevolent, world.

Another one of Bloom's judgements brings me back to the question of the dialogical openness of *A Farewell to Arms*. Borrowing on Robert Penn Warren's criticism of *To Have and Have Not* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Bloom claims that in *Farewell* Hemingway's "system of ironies and understatements" becomes unpersuasive, that the novel "cannot sustain itself upon the rhetoric of vignette" (4). Perhaps so. Yet, while it may be true that for many Hemingway's tropes become monotonous, his maintenance of all the novel's characters as valid, free-standing speakers keeps the novel's meaning open. So too does his presentation of Switzerland as a potential utopia.

Perhaps because of his interest in Bakhtinian dialogism, James Phelan focuses on the meaning of Switzerland in this novel. However, since we both agree and disagree, it's necessary for me to sketch out our differences. Phelan recognized that dialogical openness is achieved in a novel through themes, issues and episodes that readers cannot resolve into a stable "message." An apparent message may emerge but quickly confronts its countermesssage—which is itself countered by the original message. This pattern, Gary Saul Morson argues, is characteristic of metaparodic genres. Thus, the dialogical ambiguity that we usually see in unresolvable positions voiced by characters can also be conveyed by passages that attach conflicting associations to, say, a place. Phelan discusses *Farewell's* Swiss episode as a kind of exchange between the possibility of Frederic and Catherine achieving utopia (happiness) and the inevitability of their losing it: "Hemingway, Frederic and Catherine have reached a place that is both idyllic and impossible to maintain."

So far so good. We begin to part ways, however, when Phelan places blame for the impending tragedy solely on a malevolent world: "[Hemingway wants] to show also that Frederic and Catherine sense that their life has no future, to show further that if the world were different, [they] would always be very happy, and that the reason they

are only sometimes happy lies not with them but with the world and their knowledge of it." Hemingway's ultimate aim is "to make a further thematic point about how best to respond to a knowledge of the world" (66). What is troubling once again is Phelan's readiness to dismiss Frederic's and Catherine's choices as an element in their sad fate and his assumption that Hemingway believes in a way to live happily or even gracefully in the world.

For Hemingway, Switzerland is symbolic ground. "Cross Country Snow" offers an image of Switzerland that at first seems idyllic but then becomes "real." The setting is a ski slope and peasant tavern near Montreux. Nick is gloriously happy, skiing, drinking and eating with his friend, George. Then the appearance of a pregnant waitress ruptures Nick's happiness. Suddenly, he is aware of his impending responsibilities as a father, which seem to depress him. It is important to realize that this story sets up the interplay between Nick's happiness and terror on the banks of the Big Two-Hearted River, where Nick attempts courageously but futilely to sort out the frightening emotions of being a veteran, a writer, and possibly, a husband and a father. Both Switzerland and the river area are presented as meta-utopias, places where an idyllic happiness seems possible, even enduring, but where responsibilities intrude to spoil things. Reminders of responsibilities—pregnant women, impenetrable swamps, haunting memories—parody the idyllic times, but by the same token, the idyllic times parody Nick's terrors. Happiness seems tantalizingly close, achievable, but painful memories and responsibilities intrude.

In *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway presents a very similar equation. Switzerland is at first presented as a kind of utopia, especially for a world at war. As Frederic and Catherine arrive in the Swiss town of Brissago and are treated well, it becomes clear that Swiss neutrality and respect for individual freedom contrast sharply with Italy's involvement in war and the proto-fascism of the carabinieri at the Tagliamento bridge. The two lovers, "cockeyed" with excitement, agree that Switzerland is a "grand country" and now refer to the Italy they had once enjoyed so much as "that bloody place" (278). At first, this judgment is affirmed. The lover/cousins show that they have money to spend, and there is no "unpleasantness" from the "practical" Swiss about the implausible story that they rowed across Lago Maggiore for the winter sport. The

real world intrudes only through the papers, which are bad reading because "Everything was going very badly everywhere" (292). Everywhere but Switzerland.

Clearly Hemingway uses this episode as a counterpoint to later tragedy. However, even this happiness seems fragile. Frederic and Catherine are haunted by the limitations of their current life, such as their obstetrician's ominous comments on Catherine's narrow hips:

[Catherine:] "Do you think I ought to drink another beer? The doctor said I was rather narrow in the hips and it's all for the best if we keep young Catherine small."

[Frederic:] "What else did he say?" I was worried.

"Nothing. I have wonderful blood-pressure darling. He admired my blood-pressure greatly."

"What did he say about you being too narrow in the hips?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all" (294)

Frederic lets himself be put off, but the danger is real. Millicent Bell, Judith Fetterley, Sandra Whipple Spanier and others have noted how Catherine carries the greater burden of worry during this time. She puts on a brave face with Frederic, but seems embarrassed to be pregnant and unmarried, researching American legitimacy laws without telling him and lying to her hairdresser that she was the mother of two girls and two boys.

Eventually, Hemingway places enough of this sort of dissonance into Frederic's and Catherine's conversations to parody utopian Switzerland. What at first seems attractive about Switzerland—that Frederic and Catherine are alone and not knows, that their unwanted responsibilities are relinquished, that their behavior "doesn't make any difference"—threaten the lovers' happiness. We know that Frederic loves things that "make a difference"—Aymo's kindness rather than Piani's crudeness, skillful surgery rather than butchery, soldierly competence under fire rather than the carabinieri's cowardly jingoism. Frederic must know that such qualities and skills are hard-won, especially in a world less "practical" than Switzerland. He can't abandon his standards without dissonance. That Frederic should at first seek an uncomplicated life after his desertion is perhaps natural. But eventually he and Catherine will have to disturb their pure union with the usual contacts, affiliations and dependencies of "real" life. As

much as Frederic doesn't want to talk or think about his responsibilities—he tells Catherine not to talk about his family or he'll start worrying about them—they live on. In fact, he jokes that reminders of past affiliations, “the Allied flags,” would make the lovers' hotel room a home (309). Frederic's decorating idea is made in fun, but its inclusion in the novel hints that Hemingway realized that his lovers have given up too much for love—have been betrayed by their own fantasies about life. “Poor things,” Leslie A. Fiedler writes of Frederic and Catherine. “[A]ll they wanted was innocent orgasm after orgasm on an island of peace in a world at war, love making without end in a scarcely real country to which neither owed life or allegiance” (317).

The cost of living in such a country is evident in Frederic's bitter joke that growing a beard “will give [him] something to do” (298). Catherine lets this slip pass. But the non-idyllic truth is out: Frederic is human after all, he misses his work and his friends, and perhaps feels guilty about his desertion of his adopted army as well. “Who do you wonder about?” Catherine asks. “About Rinaldi and the priest and lots of people I know,” Frederic responds. “But I don't think about them much. I don't want to think about the war. I'm through with it” (298). But Frederic hasn't really put the war behind him. His present life is a direct result of his experience with the war, and there are signs the Swiss life isn't ideal. Frederic doesn't sleep for a long time that night. The reason isn't given, but it seems connected with that evening's conversation in which Frederic admits to Catherine, “I'm no good when you're not there. I haven't any life at all any more” (300).

This admission of course foretells Frederic's situation at the conclusion of the novel, where he truly has “no life at all.” He has no love, no child, no country, no army, no faith, no diversions, no friends, no home, no family (in any meaningful sense), no work. The irony here is stunning. He and Catherine had come to Switzerland to flee messy affiliations with these things (except of course the lover and the child). As though it were true that when the gods want to punish us they answer our prayers, Frederic finds himself in a Switzerland where nothing matters, nothing at all. And if I understand the consequences of his desertion, he cannot travel out of Switzerland until the war (which is now “going badly”) is over; he would have to

pass through either an Allied country or Germany, both of which currently want to kill him.

For many critics, Catherine's death has spared Frederic the life of frightening adult responsibilities. John Killinger, for instance, writes that "the darkness of Catherine's death is a cloud spread by the author as a disguise for pulling off a *deus ex machina* to save his hero from the existential hell of a complicated life" (47). But while Frederic is without the usual responsibilities of conventional American fathers, it seems unfair to say that Hemingway really saved Frederic from "the existential hell of a complicated life." Frederic's situation at the close of the novel is extraordinarily complicated. He needs to reestablish a normal or useful or acceptable role in his former world, or find a new world that will accept him. He needs to justify himself to those who will have heard only the "official" version of his desertion.

Mostly, he needs to acknowledge his complicity in Catherine's death—something I'm not at all sure he has done even years after the war. Catherine has died giving birth to a child conceived in carelessness and unwanted by its father. Surely circumstances have conspired against Frederic. But surely he has conspired against himself as well.

Hemingway leaves Frederic, perhaps his last truly complex character, not in an existential but in a dialogical world. The only real difference is that in the dialogical world we acknowledge the pleasures of life as well as the pain, our responsibilities as well as our fates—and the fact that if love is transitory, so is grief.

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