III Evaluating—and Resisting—Character and Progression
Evaluation and Resistance: 
The Case of Catherine Barkley 

To this point, my questions about character and progression have been contained within the fence erected by my concern with entering the authorial audience. Moreover, in specifying the way the components of character relate to each other and to the progression of the different narratives we have examined, I have also implicitly been accepting—even honoring—those works. Now I would like to turn my attention to the great wide world beyond the fence, or, to switch metaphors, to move from understanding to "overstanding"—that is, to some critical evaluation of what we have understood. What happens when we enter the authorial audience only to find the author's hospitality lacking—or even offensive? On what rhetorical ground do we take our stand when we want not only to resist a narrative and its characters but also to claim that the resistance is more than personal or idiosyncratic? Or to phrase the question in the way most pertinent to this inquiry: what happens when a character performs thematic functions that clash with the values of a substantial number of flesh-and-blood readers?

The thematic functions of Catherine Barkley in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* provide an instructive and challenging opportunity for exploring this side of our rhetorical exchange with authors. On the one hand, these thematic functions seem to invite negative responses from most modern readers—Catherine apparently reflects Hemingway's sexism—but on the other, their relations to her mimetic and especially her synthetic functions complicate the act of overstanding by making us reassess our understanding. Indeed, of the narratives we have examined so far, Hemingway's has probably received the greatest range of interpretation and evaluation. For some critics Frederic Henry is an estimable hero, for others a figure to be scorned or perhaps pitied; for some, the novel is an achievement of
the first rank, for others a sentimental or pernicious tale. Consequently, before our understanding can proceed with any confidence we will need to reconstruct carefully the narrative's progression and Catherine's various functions within it. We will pay special attention to her synthetic component, not because it is foregrounded like Wemrick's but because the uses to which Hemingway puts Catherine have an especially intricate relation to her thematic functions. In order to provide the best context for this whole investigation, let us begin with a look at a vigorous attack on the novel that includes a strong indictment of Hemingway's characterization of Catherine: Judith Fetterley's feminist critique in *The Resisting Reader.*

II

Fetterley's project is to "make palpable" the designs that American fiction has on its female readers (p. xii), to uncover the covert story of men's power over women that repeatedly appears in the canonized works of male authors. In *A Farewell to Arms* the issue of power is thoroughly obscured by the mythology, language, and structure of romantic love and by the invocation of an abstract, though spiteful "they" whose goal is to break the good, the beautiful, and the brave. Yet the brave who is broken is Catherine; at the end of the novel Catherine is dead, Frederic is alive. . . . Frederic survives several years of war, massive injuries, the dangers of a desperate retreat, and the threat of execution by his own army; Catherine dies in her first pregnancy. Clearly, biology is destiny. Yet Catherine is [also] . . . a scapegoat. . . . For Frederic to survive, free of the intolerable burdens of marriage, family, and fatherhood, yet with his vision of himself as the heroic victim of cosmic antagonism intact, Catherine must die. Frederic's necessities determine Catherine's fate. He is, indeed, the agent of her death. (Pp. xv-xvi)

Fetterley divides her detailed reading of the novel into five sections. The first opens by claiming that the novel is a lie, whose surface idealization of romantic love disguises Frederic's "true aims:" to evade the fact that he must grow up and to eliminate Catherine because she threatens to force adulthood upon him (p. 47). This surface idealization, then, disguises "a hostility whose full measure can be taken from the fact that Catherine dies and dies because she is a woman" (p. 49). From these claims, this section moves on to explore the way in which the background of the whole love story, the culture of war—reflected for the most part in Rinaldi's comments—"erases the distinctions among women that normally keep male hostility under
some restraint and... legitimizes aggression against all women” (p. 49). The second section narrows its focus to Frederic Henry. Fet­terley claims that despite his superficial apparent difference from his companions, Frederic embodies the attitudes of his culture toward women. He resents women such as Miss Van Campen who are in positions of authority and is contemptuous of women such as Mrs. Walker who are less than competent. More importantly, his ultimate attitude toward Catherine is hostility:

If the violence of the novel’s ending is striking, so too is its abstract nature, its reliance on a biological trap which is the agent of an impersonal “they” who break the brave and the beautiful. Yet surely this abstraction masks both Frederic’s fear of Catherine and his hostility toward her. The image of strangulation, suggested by the comparison with Othello [Catherine has called Frederic “Othello with his occupation gone”], persists, leaving in us the nagging suspicion that Frederic Henry sees himself in the dead fetus which emerges from Catherine’s womb and that her death, however much it may be shaped as biological accident, is in fact the fulfillment of his own unconscious wish, his need to kill her lest she kill him. (P. 53)

The third section seeks to demonstrate this charge more fully by examining the relation between Frederic and Catherine. The basis of that relationship is Frederic’s desire to be served and Catherine’s willingness to meet his needs.

It is possible for Frederic to love Catherine because she provides him with the only kind of relationship he is capable of accepting: he does not have to act; he does not have to think about things because she thinks for him...; he does not have to assume responsibility; and he does not have to make a final commitment because both her facile logic and her ultimate death give him a convenient out. (Pp. 59–60)

Furthermore, Frederic erects a phony moral basis for his refusal to accept responsibility in his “sense that he is a victim of betrayal” (p. 61). Catherine serves this sense by betraying him too. She “entangles him in a relationship with her, pretending that there will be no drawbacks, no demands, pressures, or responsibilities, only benefits; then she gets pregnant” (p.61). That pregnancy of course eventually leads to her death, which makes Frederic feel even more like a victim. So in serving his sense of betrayal, she also fails him. She can’t win, but “her death is the logical consequence of the cumulative hostilities Frederic feels toward her, and the final expression of the connection between the themes of love and war” (p. 62).
In the fourth section, Fetterley seeks to demonstrate that the novel connects the womb and death. She notes the connection made in the first chapter's description of soldiers carrying their ammunition—"the cartridge boxes . . . bulged forward under the capes so that the men, passing on the road, marched as though they were six months gone with child"—and comments that the novel could hardly state more clearly "that pregnancy is death and the womb an agent of destruction" (p. 61). Fetterley then traces the contrasts the novel establishes between inner and outer space, arguing finally that the safe inner world of the womb becomes "a chamber of horrors filled with blood and death" (p. 65).

In the fifth and final section, Fetterley discusses the contradictions of Catherine's character—sometimes tough, sometimes gentle, sometimes romantic, sometimes businesslike, sometimes a partner who acts as Hemingway's version of the male buddy, sometimes a companion who is the essence of the feminine. Fetterley maintains that "Catherine's contradictions are not resolvable because her character is determined by forces outside of her; it is a reflection of male psychology and male fantasy life and is understandable only when seen as a series of responses to the male world that surrounds her" (p. 66). To read her character carefully, for Fetterley, is once again to discover the hostility toward women underlying the whole narrative. Catherine "defines herself in terms of men," and she adopts a negative self-image as a result: "in a world in which the ideal is an asexual priest and in which women are defined solely in sexual terms, it is no wonder Catherine hates herself and feels guilty for existing" (p. 69). And so she is always apologizing. Moreover, in a final expression of hostility, according to Fetterley, "the responsibility for both her death and the child's is implicitly placed on Catherine" (p. 70), while the male doctor's competence is never questioned. In summary,

if we weep at the end of the book . . . , it is not for Catherine but for Frederic Henry. All our tears are ultimately for men, because in the world of A Farewell to Arms male life is what counts. And the message to women reading this classic love story and experiencing its image of the female ideal is clear and simple: the only good woman is a dead one, and even then there are questions. (P. 71)

The specifics of this powerful indictment, I think, are best assessed not one at a time but as part of a consideration of Fetterley's whole interpretive method. Her practical criticism, like that of Scholes and Brooks, raises some significant questions about methodology, though, unlike theirs, her project is not explicitly theoretical and so does not directly address those issues. The methodological question underlying her analysis is how one determines what a covert story is,
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or, more formally, what principles guide the operation of uncovering the covert story implied in a narrative. We can readily identify two: (1) The inferences about what is covert need to follow from a satisfactory explanation, tacit or expressed, of the overt story. If one mischaracterizes the overt story, then the inferences one draws about its covert message will be highly suspect—at best one could be right for the wrong reason; at worst, one could be resisting not the author's narrative but only some of the material out of which the narrative is built, or even a different narrative constructed by the critic out of the same materials as the author's. (2) Those inferences ought to follow from a pattern detectable in the overt story. Since any one character, incident, or narrative comment can easily be recontextualized and offered in support of countless covert messages (one could, for example, construct a hypothesis about Hemingway's covert negative message about Switzerland on the basis of Catherine's dying there or a positive one on the basis of its being like the priest's homeland, the Abruzzi), the plausibility of any one hypothesis will depend in large part on its being anchored in a recognizable pattern in the overt story. In any one case, then, the successful execution of this second principle will depend on the successful execution of the first. One can only detect the patterns after the details of the whole have been arranged.

My claim here is that characterizing the whole is logically prior to detecting the pattern; it may or may not be temporally prior. Some critics may detect a pattern before they detect the configuration of the whole; the understanding of that pattern and its effects, however, must be confirmed or disconfirmed by the understanding of the whole.

Fetterley implicitly acknowledges the necessity of seeing the covert as tied to the overt in her characterization of the overt as based on the mythology of romantic love and in her attempts to show the various patterns of the novel's hostility toward women under that myth. But since she spends so much time on her claims about the patterns of hostility and so little on the way in which the overt narrative asks the reader to take those elements constituting the pattern, we must pause before fully accepting her indictment. Is Fetterley resisting Hemingway's narrative or some possible narrative she has implicitly constructed out of Hemingway's material? This question has greater force when we note that her handling of the textual evidence in making her case for the covert message rests on three significant methodological assumptions: (1) There is no significant progression in the book, except for its gradual revelation of male hostility toward women. Although Frederic's external circumstances change, his character remains largely unchanged. Thus, Frederic's attitudes toward Catherine
early in the narrative can be taken as an accurate sign of his later attitude toward her. Imagery from one part of the narrative can be related directly to later parts; to take just one instance, Fetterley has no apparent qualms in building her case that Catherine's remark about Othello is a sufficient sign that Henry wants to kill Catherine before she kills him.\(^4\) (2) The male characters can be seen as reliably reflecting Hemingway's beliefs. Thus, Rinaldi's views of women can be taken as Hemingway's views of women. Thus, Frederic's attitude toward Catherine early in the narrative reflects Hemingway's. (3) Efficient causes are actually final causes. Although Frederic sees the final cause of Catherine's death as the nature of the world, Fetterley never gives serious consideration to that explanation. For her, it is simply a mask behind which Frederic hides the real final cause, his—and Hemingway's—hostility toward her.

Now this third assumption is one that is clearly part of Fetterley's resistance. We can ask for a warrant for the assumption, but simply to point out that the narrative makes a distinction between the two kinds of causes is only to tell Fetterley what she already knows. The first two assumptions, however, have a different status. Fetterley does not claim that the overt story offers a progression that is covertly undermined, or that it offers an apparent distance between author and character that is covertly closed. Instead, she is working to uncover the attitudes hidden beneath the romantic surface of an overt story that exhibits progression of circumstance but no progression of attitudes and that establishes no significant difference between the author and his male characters.

As might be expected by anyone who has stayed with me this far, I think that the key assumption is the one about the progression. If Fetterley is justified there, then her indictment will be far more convincing than otherwise. If, for example, she is justified there, then she will in effect be giving a warrant for her third assumption: if the only significant progression is the gradual revelation of the hostility of men to women, then the covert message of Catherine's death would be that she died because she was a woman. If, however, her assumption about the progression does not hold up, then much of her case will be in jeopardy, because in effect the narrative that she is resisting will not be Hemingway's. Let us now turn to consider the progression of the overt story in some detail.

III

The central progression of the novel begins in the first chapter with the establishment of a tension between Frederic and the authorial au-
dience. That tension is made possible by Hemingway’s careful control of the first-person narration in the famous opening.

In the late summer of that year we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains. In the bed of the river there were pebbles and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels. Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year. . . .

The authorial audience infers Hemingway’s negative attitude toward the troops, his message about their disruption of nature: the appealing vision of river, plain, and mountains, of the boulders and pebbles of the riverbed and the clear, blue water of its channels is disrupted by the entry of the troops whose marching eventually leads to the unnatural, early falling of the leaves. Because Frederic, however, is just describing and not analyzing—we supply the causal links, he piles up the “ands”—it is questionable whether he shares in this communication between Hemingway and the authorial audience. This question persists as Hemingway uses Frederic’s narration to show us a connection between the rain and the destruction of life, a connection that also is established in part through descriptions of the trees: “in the fall when the rains came the leaves all fell from the chestnut trees and the branches were bare and the trunks black with rain. The vineyards were thin and bare-branched too and all the country wet and brown and dead with autumn” (p. 4). The final sentences of the chapter answer the question. “At the start of the winter came the permanent rain and with the rain came the cholera. But it was checked and in the end only seven thousand died of it in the army” (p. 4).

The authorial audience blanches at that “only” and at the restricted concern with the “army.” Even acknowledging that a cholera epidemic could easily wipe out more than seven thousand, we cannot overlook the callous attitude toward those troops (and an untold number of civilians) that is expressed in the sentence. Frederic seems to be mouthing here the party line, the official account of what happened, just as in his later debate with Passini he will mouth the official line that defeat is worse than war. In sum, by the end of the first chapter the authorial audience knows that it is being addressed by a narrator whose knowledge of his own situation is more limited than its own and whose values are rather distant from those of his author.

The progression is then further complicated by the introduction of the major instabilities: Frederic’s situation as an American in the Ital-
ian army and his relation with Catherine. Here too we recognize a distance between him and Hemingway: he has simply drifted into the war, and he feels distant from it. "Well, I knew I would not be killed. Not in this war. It did not have anything to do with me. It seemed no more dangerous to me myself than war in the movies" (p. 37). He becomes interested in Catherine because pursuing her "was better than going every evening to the house for officers where the girls climbed all over you and put your cap on backward as a sign of affection between their trips upstairs with brother officers" (p. 30). He does not recognize her own insight into the games they are playing, does not realize all the ways in which she is in control of what happens between them.

In short, at the outset of the narrative, Hemingway asks us to regard Frederic as a callow, unreflective, self-centered youth, who is in over his head both in the war and in his relationship with Catherine. The complications of the main instabilities follow a path that gradually also leads to a resolution of the initial tension. The progression traces Frederic's slow evolution into a mature man who both learns and faces up to what the narrative presents as the overwhelming truth of his existence. He is in danger not just from the war but from the world itself, which is inevitably and wantonly destructive. In his initial stumbling through this world, he is introduced by Catherine to the possibility of an alternate world. He slowly realizes what that world is all about, slowly realizes its difference from and superiority to the world of the war that he has been living in, and he eventually commits himself to a life with Catherine in which they try to live in that alternate world.

When Frederic first sees Catherine walk into his hospital room in Milan, he claims that "I was in love with her" (p. 89). But Hemingway does not give his authorial endorsement to Frederic's claim. Instead Hemingway shows that although Frederic has moved beyond preferring Catherine to the whores at the front, his love is still seriously deficient. Frederic is in love with Catherine's physical beauty, but he still does not commit himself fully to her, as Hemingway indicates through Frederic's selfish reaction to the news of her pregnancy and through his characteristically unthinking decision to leave her and head back to the front. Both actions also maintain the tension, because they show that he still does not know what we—and Catherine—know about the world. After the disastrous retreat from Caporetto that leads Henry to make his separate peace, one of the major instabilities is all but resolved. Frederic and Catherine need to get fully clear of the army and the war, as they eventually do in the flight to Switzerland, but Frederic's symbolic baptism in the Tagliamento signals the end of his own involvement in the war.
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By this point, however, the authorial audience has seen so much evidence of Hemingway's view of the world that a new kind of instability replaces that one—and in fact carries the narrative through to the end. Once we know that the world is destructive, then we know—in general terms at least—the outcome of the narrative. We read on both to see how that outcome will emerge and to see whether Frederic will come to know what Hemingway, the authorial audience, and Catherine already know. This instability becomes even more prominent because once Frederic returns to Catherine the instability about his commitment to her is resolved. "Often a man wishes to be alone and a girl wishes to be alone too and if they love each other they are jealous of that in each other, but I can truly say we never felt that. We could feel alone when we were together, alone against the others. It has happened to me like that once. I have been alone while I was with many girls and that is the way you can be most lonely. But we were never lonely and never afraid when we were together" (pp. 238–39). As this passage indicates, the final section of the narrative shows Frederic's growing knowledge of the world, a knowledge ultimately attained through his witnessing of the death of his child and especially the death of Catherine. The separate world he and Catherine have sought to create has not been expanded but destroyed, and Frederic is left to live out his life with the knowledge of what he has lost and the certainty that there is no escape from the destruction he has just experienced.

The emotional quality of this progression is similar to that we associate with tragedy, but its trajectory is different from the classical pattern. Given Hemingway's view of the world, Frederic's doom is a condition of existence, not something that he is even partly responsible for: there is no moment of tragic choice here. And unlike Oedipus, Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, and King Lear who become increasingly ravaged as their tragedies unfold, Frederic actually grows in wisdom and grace. As he slowly changes, he becomes more and more aligned with Hemingway's norms—and thus more estimable in the eyes of the authorial audience. The last step in that growth is not made until the last sentences of the narrative, which provide both completeness and closure as they depict Frederic's response to his loss.

His initial impulse is to have one final romantic scene with Catherine, and he chases the nurses out of the hospital room to be alone with her. "But after I got them out and turned off the light it wasn't any good. It was like saying good-bye to a statue" (p. 314). As Eugene B. Cantelupe has noted, Frederic's earlier reflections on the marble busts in the hospital at the front have loaded the simile with great force: "They had the complete marble quality of looking alike. Sculp-
ture had seemed a dull business... marble busts all looked like a cemetery" (p. 28). Frederic now must face the reality of Catherine's death and respond to that. The very last sentence of the narrative, "After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain" (p. 314), conveys the knowledge (after a while) and the grief (it was what makes him move so slowly) and the control (he moves nevertheless, even as he is being hit in the face with the destructive rain) behind his very deliberate action. The instabilities and tensions are all resolved here. There is nothing left for him to do for Catherine. There is no longer any gap in either his knowledge about or his experience of the world's destructiveness. His doom is complete. And yet in spite of his knowledge and in spite of his experience, he is not crushed but takes a step that indicates he may become one of those who are strong at the broken places.

If even this partial analysis of the progression has merit, then, as noted above, it casts strong doubt on much of Fetterley's indictment. If Frederic's treatment of Catherine throughout much of the book is not endorsed by Hemingway, then it cannot be used as evidence of Hemingway's view of women. At the same time, this analysis leaves parts of the indictment untouched. Fetterley's point about the covert message of Frederic's treatment of women in authority or without appropriate competence does correspond to a pattern in the overt story that the progression neither requires nor transforms. But of course the crucial issue for assessing Fetterley's resistance is the narrative's treatment of Catherine, the subject to which I now turn.

IV

Though incomplete, the above analysis of the progression indicates that for the novel to be effective Hemingway needs to accomplish at least three synthetic tasks: (1) provide some means to bring about Frederic's change; (2) incorporate evidence that the world is in fact destructive; and (3) create the sense that Catherine's death is not the fault of anything or anyone except the impersonal "they" who kill everyone eventually, hurrying after only the very good and the very gentle and the very brave. Significantly, Hemingway gives Catherine synthetic functions that contribute to his accomplishing all three of these tasks.

More than anything or anyone else Catherine is responsible for the change in Frederic, for his growth in knowledge about the world and for his corresponding growth in unselfish love. To be sure, Henry's experiences in the war contribute to his knowledge about the world
but it is his life with Catherine that enables him to understand the significance of those experiences. Hemingway shows us, for example, that even after watching Passini die a very painful death and having his own knee blown up, Frederic is blind to the nature of the war. Immediately before those events Frederic and Passini argue about the war: the Italian driver claims that nothing is worse, while Frederic rather weakly maintains that defeat is worse.

“It could not be worse,” Passini said respectfully. “There is nothing worse than war.”

“Defeat is worse.”


“Tenente,” Passini said. “We understand you let us talk. Listen. There is nothing as bad as war. We in the auto-ambulance cannot even realize at all how bad it is. When people realize how bad it is they cannot do anything to stop it because they go crazy. There are some people who never realize. There are people who are afraid of their officers. It is with them the war is made.”

“I know it is bad but we must finish it.”

“It doesn’t finish. There is no finish to a war.”

“Yes there is.”

Passini shook his head.

“War is not won by victory. What if we take San Gabriele? What if we take the Carso and Monfalcone and Trieste? Where are we then? Did you see all the far mountains to-day? Do you think we could take them all too? Only if the Austrians stop fighting. One side must stop fighting. Why don’t we stop fighting? If they come down into Italy they will get tired and go away. They have their own country. But no, there is a war.” (Pp. 49–50)

At this point, Frederic essentially gives up the argument by commenting on Passini’s delivery rather than replying to the substance of his remark: “You’re an orator” (p. 50).

With this argument as backdrop, Frederic’s description of the shelling that kills Passini and injures himself takes on more significance:

Through the other noise I heard a cough, then came the chuh-chuh-chuh—then there was a flash, as when a blast-furnace door is swung open, and a roar that started white and went red and on and on in a rushing wind. I tried to breathe but my breath would not come and I felt myself rush bodily out of myself and out and out and out and all the time bodily in the wind. I went out swiftly, all of myself, and I knew I was dead and that it had all been a mistake to think you just died. Then I floated, and instead of going on I felt myself slide back. . . . In the jolt of my head I heard somebody crying. I thought somebody was screaming. I tried to
move but I could not move. I heard the machine-guns and rifles firing across the river and all along the river. There was a great splashing and I saw the star-shells go up and burst and float whitely and rockets going up and heard the bombs, all this in a moment, and then I heard close to me some one saying "Mama Mia! oh, Mama Mia!" I pulled and twisted and got my legs loose finally and turned around and touched him. It was Passini and when I touched him he screamed. His legs were toward me and I saw in the dark and the light that they were both smashed above the knee. One leg was gone and the other was held by tendons and part of the trouser and the stump twitched and jerked as though it were not connected. He bit his arm and moaned, "Oh mama mia, mama Mia," then, "Dio te salve, Maria. Dio te salve, Maria. Oh Jesus shoot me Christ shoot me mama mia mama Mia oh purest lovely Mary shoot me. Stop it. Stop it. Stop it. Oh Jesus lovely Mary stop it. Oh oh oh oh," then choking "Mama mama mia." Then he was quiet, biting his arm, the stump of his leg twitching. (P. 54)

When the priest then visits Frederic in the hospital, he tells Frederic, "You do not mind the war. You do not see it. You must forgive me. I know you are wounded." Henry replies, "That is an accident." The priest: "Still even wounded you do not see it" (p. 68). Yet when Frederic and the priest next discuss the war—upon Frederic's return to the front after his summer of convalescence in Milan—Frederic adopts Passini's position. He tells the priest that victory may be worse than defeat because it prolongs the war and that "the peasant has wisdom because he is defeated from the start." Reflecting on these statements, Frederic says, "I do not think and yet when I begin to talk I say things that I have found out in my mind without thinking" (p. 172).

For the authorial audience, however, the experience of reading the preceding chapters describing Frederic's life with Catherine in Milan leads to a more concrete source of Frederic's mental turnabout—Catherine herself. As Spanier points out, Catherine knows what the war—and the world—are like before she meets Henry. During their first conversation, she says, "People can't realize what France is like. If they did, it couldn't all go on. He didn't have a sabre cut. They blew him all to bits" (p. 20). Much of her behavior in the novel, especially her willingness to give herself to Frederic and to construct their alternate world, is a response to this knowledge. Given the belief that the world is inevitably destructive, she doesn't care any more about her own soon-to-be-destroyed identity; she cares instead about living for as long as she can in a world built on the values of gentleness, service,
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and communion. Catherine occasionally articulates pieces of this knowledge, but it is her behavior that affects Frederic. To move as Frederic does from life with Catherine to life on the front is to move from a world of tenderness and gentleness to a world of impersonal violence and destruction. It is no wonder that upon returning to the front Henry is suddenly able to articulate his newfound appreciation for defeat and the gentleness that accompanies it.

Similarly it is also not surprising that he articulates his knowledge of the world directly after the account of his reunion with Catherine in Stresa. Although the shift in tense indicates that he has attained this knowledge only after the events of the narrative, his placement suggests how strongly he associates that knowledge with Catherine. Thus, the apparently abrupt transition from his thoughts about Catherine to his thoughts about the world is striking but logical—it is she who has taught him:

I know that the night is not the same as the day: that all things are different, that the things of the night cannot be explained in the day, because they do not then exist, and the night can be a dreadful time for lonely people once their loneliness has started. But with Catherine there was almost no difference in the night except that it was an even better time. 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 it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry. (Pp. 238–39)

As Catherine teaches Henry, she also teaches the authorial audience—though she is not the only element of the novel providing evidence for Hemingway's case that the world is malevolent. Frederic's unreflective descriptions of the war, the rain, the cholera, and the various injuries and deaths he witnesses are what give us this instruction most strongly. But once these descriptions illustrate Hemingway's view, he can then use Catherine to speak about the world for him in order to reinforce or extend this view. "I'm afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it" (p. 121). "There's only us two and in the world there's all the rest of them. If anything comes between us we're gone and then they have us" (p. 134). "I'm not brave anymore, darling. I'm all broken... They just keep it up till they break you" (p. 306). As the narrative progresses and Hemingway uses Frederic's descriptions and Catherine's comments to make his world view clearer and clearer, our knowledge that Henry and Catherine
are doomed becomes firmer and firmer—and part of our knowledge
is that this doom is a condition of existence, not the responsibility of
any human agent.

Fetterley's neglect of these synthetic functions in the overt story is
a serious omission in her analysis. As Hemingway has Catherine per­
form these functions, he in effect stands with her as they both look
down upon Frederic. To argue that there is an underlying hostility in
this major aspect of Hemingway's characterization is to argue that
Hemingway is using Catherine to express hostility toward himself.
That line of argument may have a certain appeal, but it would lead to
a very different covert story from the one Fetterley recounts. Never­
theless, what we have seen so far is not the whole story of Catherine's
role in the narrative.

In addition to the synthetic functions traced above, Catherine per­
forms one more in her death, for that event is not only the final sign
of the world's malevolence but also the final test of Frederic's growth.
As noted above, to know the nature of the world abstractly is one
thing, to experience its destruction in the most painfully personal
way is another, and to respond to that pain without being destroyed
even further yet another. Frederic is able to survive this test, and for
that Hemingway asks us to admire him. The point I want to stress
now is that in this synthetic function, as in the others, Catherine is
subordinated to Frederic; her death provides the occasion for the last
stage of his growth. Whether there is an offensive covert implication
here is a question that we can better answer after considering Cath­
erine's mimetic and thematic functions and their relations to these
synthetic ones. Since Catherine's mimetic function has been espe­
cially problematic, I shall begin with it.

Setting aside for the moment the extent to which she is the product
of a male fantasy, we can recognize that she possesses the following
traits: she is tall, blond, attractive, and slim-hipped; she is self­
effacing, gentle, and compliant; sexually inexperienced but knowl­
dgeable about the world; despite her gentleness, tough in the face of
danger or pain. As Fetterley notes, critics have often found this group
of traits to result in an incoherent character—sometimes tough, some­
times gentle, sometimes a partner who acts as Hemingway's version
of the good man, sometimes a companion who is the essence of the
feminine. Yet if we can grant Hemingway his premise that the shock
of her first boyfriend's death has jolted Catherine into knowledge of
the world, then I think that she can be more accurately seen as having
a coherent mimetic function. The basis of her character is her tough­
ness, but the basis of her behavior is her knowledge of the world.
Starting with the belief that doom is a condition of existence, that the
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world will visit its impersonal violence on her, Catherine acts to establish a life based on opposing principles, on the values of gentleness, tenderness, and union with another human being. To the extent that the other also appreciates those values, she will succeed in creating that alternate though temporary life. It takes a long time, but I think that Hemingway wants us to see Frederic in Switzerland becoming such another. At the same time, because Catherine is fundamentally tough, she is able to stand up to the problems along the way: the pregnancy, Frederic's going back to the front, the flight into Switzerland, the pain of her childbirth.

Of these many attributes, only some become the basis for thematic functions. Consider, for example, the different ways the progression leads us to regard two of Catherine's physical traits, her long hair and her narrow hips. As previous critics have noted, Catherine's long hair is a sign of her feminine sexuality, but over and above that it becomes a sign of the temporary but important barrier Catherine and Frederic attempt to erect between themselves and the world's destruction.

I loved to take her hair down and she sat on the bed and kept very still, except suddenly she would dip down to kiss me while I was doing it, and I would take out the pins and lay them on the sheet and it would be loose and I would watch her while she kept very still and then take out the last two pins and it would all come down and she would drop her head and we would both be inside of it, and it was the feeling of inside a tent or behind a falls. (Pp. 109-10)

With Hemingway's implicit endorsement of the feelings expressed here, the long hair, while perhaps not being converted into a separate thematic function, certainly participates in and contributes to the thematic function carried by her traits of toughness and gentleness, namely, indicating the best responses to the world's malevolence.

I will say more about that function shortly, but first note that if I am right about the progression's emphasis on destruction as a condition of existence, then Catherine's narrow hips have no analogous function—not even in the covert story. They do provide a mimetic—and medical—explanation of why Catherine dies in childbirth, but the progression works against the inference that the width of Catherine's hips is the real cause of her death. It implies instead that the cause is the nature of the world; if it had not been her hips, it would have been something else; if it had not been in childbirth, it would have been some other time. Fetterley's complaint about Hemingway's deflecting responsibility from the doctor seems to miss this whole element of the overt story: to make the doctor responsible would be to undermine the thematic point of the whole event, since it would
imply that if they had chosen a different doctor, things could have turned out differently. Even as the progression suggests that if the doom had not come this way it would have come another, it supplies an implicit logic for this mechanism. By making the efficient cause related to Frederic and Catherine's lovemaking, which is itself so connected to their attempts to construct an alternate world, the progression reinforces the point about the world's malevolence. Second, by making Catherine the one who dies, the progression recalls Frederic's earlier conclusion that the world goes after the very good and the very brave and the very gentle first. To argue that the covert message here is that Catherine dies because of her female biology is, I think, not to resist the overt story but to ignore it.

Now consider Catherine's gentleness and her toughness. Together these traits form the basis of her identification as one of those who is strong at the broken places and as one of the very good and brave and gentle. In short, Catherine's response to her knowledge of the world—her attempt to establish an alternate way of life—and her tough response to pain and danger, especially to her own impending death during childbirth, serve the thematic function of demonstrating how one should act in the face of such knowledge. In performing this thematic function, Catherine again stands with Hemingway, or as Spanier puts it, she fulfills the role of a code heroine. Furthermore, the strong connection between Catherine's synthetic functions and this thematic function gives it a prominent place in the progression of the whole narrative.

But this is still not the whole story. Even as the progression points to this dominant thematic function, it also creates another, more problematic one connected with Fetterley's complaint about Catherine's constant desire to serve Frederic and his contentment in having her serve. Throughout their time together, both in Milan and in Switzerland, Catherine's first concern is to serve Frederic, and as she does so, he repeatedly tells us, apparently with Hemingway's approval, "we had a fine life." To enter the authorial audience, we are asked to agree, and thereby to assent to a definition of the fine life in which the female is endlessly self-effacing, tirelessly available, and continually sacrificing. In other words, Frederic's descriptions and commentary, even of their life in Switzerland, convert these traits of Catherine into a thematic function that can only be described as hopelessly sexist. In this respect, Catherine does appear to be the projection of a male fantasy.

Let us examine more closely the relation between Catherine's positive and negative thematic functions. The conclusion that the positive function has a prominent role in the progression suggests that the
negative function might in fact be what Ralph Rader has called an unintended negative consequence of a positive intention: in order for Catherine to fulfill her synthetic role as the agent of Frederic's change and her other thematic role as the exemplary respondent to the world, she unavoidably appears as the image of a sexist male's view of an ideal woman. Although this explanation has the appeal of coherently relating the functions, it is, I think, finally unsatisfactory because the allegedly unintended consequences are actually avoidable, or in other words, they appear as intended as the positive intention. The hypothesis that lets Hemingway off the hook does not pay sufficient attention to the way that the progression itself calls attention to the "fine life" with Catherine as the image of the "fine" woman, to the way that the emphasis on both this life and Catherine's subservience are prominent parts of the narrative. As Fetterley notes, Catherine does define herself in terms of men and that mode of definition appears to be taken for granted as a natural occurrence by Hemingway.

Furthermore, the explanation is not sufficiently reflective about Hemingway's alleged positive intention; instead, it is willing to start where he starts, willing in other words to take the givens of the narrative situation for granted, willing to silence by critical fiat the voices who want to argue. Fetterley certainly wants to reflect on those givens, and everyone who reads her is likely to do the same. *A Farewell to Arms* is after all a man's story and a story in which we are asked to focus on and admire the man's growth. So far so good—or at least no problem. But notice what happens: in a parallel to the way Catherine serves Frederic on the mimetic level, she also serves him—and Hemingway—on the synthetic level. The woman's initially more mature vision becomes important largely for its use in our measurement of the man. And as we have seen, the logic of the narrative dictates that the woman be sacrificed as the final test for the man's growth. Furthermore, Frederic's resentment of women in authority and his contempt for those who are not fully competent also contribute to the narrative's overall subordination of women. Finally, why should Catherine and Henry's stillborn child be male rather than female? The implicit assumption there seems to be that the death of a son will be a greater blow to Frederic than the death of a daughter. It is in short another sign of how the narrative takes for granted the subordination of women to men. To accept uncritically the invitation offered by the work, to join the authorial audience without reservation, is also to take that subordination for granted. In this context, the adjective in the phrase, "Hemingway's positive intention," becomes extremely problematic.
Once one registers these problems and registers further the facts that the work shares its premises with many, many others and that it has a firm place in the canon of American literature, many flesh and blood readers will be impelled to argue with Hemingway’s characterization of Catherine. Yet at the same time, to focus only on those problems is to miss some of the genuine power of the book, including that offered by the more successful aspects of Catherine’s characterization, especially Hemingway’s ability to make many of Catherine’s mimetic, thematic, and synthetic functions reinforce each other and contribute to the emotional power of the progression. For readers who are concerned both with entering the authorial audience and holding on to a belief in the equality of the sexes, Hemingway’s treatment of Catherine makes the experience of reading *A Farewell to Arms* almost dizzying in its complexity and contradictions: the combination of admiration and objection, of positive and negative evaluation that the narrative invites and that I have expressed and reasoned to in my allegedly neat and linear argument sometimes exists as a single, simultaneous response to the narrative. There can, consequently, be no neat and simple outcome to the reader’s response to the invitation Hemingway offers in *Farewell*. Hemingway’s characterization of Catherine is indeed sexist, but that sexism does not entirely destroy the power of the narrative or even of her own role in it, because that sexism does not exist in isolation from the more positive features of the characterization and the narrative as a whole.

But even this is not yet the whole story. For those readers who want to question thoroughly the relation between our values and those we are asked to adopt as we enter the authorial audience, there is at least one more expository event to endure. In making the case for Catherine’s positive synthetic and thematic functions, I have argued that she stands with Hemingway in her knowledge of the world and in exemplifying how to respond to that knowledge. Once we step outside the authorial audience, we recognize that this “knowledge” is actually a belief, and clearly a belief that will not be shared by all members of Hemingway’s flesh-and-blood audience. As we have seen, Fetterley does not take the belief at all seriously but views it as Frederic’s false justification of his sense of betrayal. Other critics such as Gerry Brenner view the passages in which Frederic expresses those beliefs as “self-pitying essayettes.” Even if such critics were, for the sake of argument, to accept my point that Hemingway stands behind Frederic in the “If people bring so much courage to this world” speech,
then they would argue that Hemingway is standing behind a flawed philosophy, a false truth, an erroneous belief. One consequence of that argument would of course be to undermine the grounds of my partial defense of Hemingway’s treatment of Catherine. But how would those critics make such a case? Alternatively, how would defenders of Hemingway make a persuasive case for the validity of his beliefs?

One way of arguing either side of the case is simply to invoke one’s own beliefs about—and one’s own experience in—the world: “that’s simply not true;” “Hemingway needs to find Jesus;” “Hemingway captures my experience of living in this awful world.” Flesh-and-blood readers always make such evaluations, and those evaluations are always a significant part of their responses to a narrative. Because the values, beliefs, and experiences of those readers are almost infinitely various, I cannot consider them all, and I have no ambitions to determine what everyone should believe. Yet notice that neither Fetterley nor I have hesitated about saying that a sexist presentation of Catherine ought to be judged negatively by all readers. Our willingness to speak against the values implicit in sexism is in part a reflection of a cultural norm held by the members of our social class: the feminist movement has arguably had its most consistent (if not its most significant) success among the upwardly mobile, politically liberal members of the American academy. Indeed, to speak in defense of Catherine may be to put in question one’s credentials as a politically correct literary critic.

Be that as it may, the social pressure in the academy that reinforces the norm against sexism only partially warrants the complaints about sexism. Underneath that pressure is a clear ethical position that can legitimately claim to transcend the differences among the various specific belief systems of Western culture: To assume that women are inherently inferior to men is to deny full humanity to women. The norms, however, that may be invoked either for or against Hemingway’s world view—those, say, of existentialism on the one side and Catholicism on the other—do not transcend the differences among specific belief systems and, thus, do not imply any ethical norm as widely shared as the one against sexism. Yet if we look closely at the method controlling the assessment of Hemingway’s uses of Catherine to this point, we can still find some guidance for evaluating Hemingway’s beliefs about the world—and by extension Catherine’s roles that are connected with it.

My method so far has been to explore two questions: (1) How well has Hemingway incorporated Catherine’s mimetic, synthetic, and thematic functions into the larger progression of the distinct narrative
tragedy that he is writing? (2) What are the ethics of reading Cather­
ine as the authorial audience is asked to do? Or, what ethical position
must one adopt to enter fully into the authorial audience's expected
responses to Catherine's functions? The negative element of my eval­
uation stems from the conclusion that to enter into the authorial
audience is occasionally to participate in and give consent to the defi­
cient ethics of sexism. The analogous questions about Hemingway's
world view, then, are: (1) How well is it incorporated into the narra­
tive so that a flesh-and-blood reader may be induced to enter the au­
thorial audience and adopt that view at least for the time that she is
reading the narrative? And (2) what are the ethical consequences of
adopting this world view?

Hemingway, I think, takes great pains to incorporate convincingly
his world view into the narrative as a whole. The key problem he
faced was one of appropriate generalization: most readers would be
willing to agree that war is inevitably destructive, but how could
he extend their belief about war to a belief about the world? His first
device, one which I think is overdone, though not fatally so, is to
establish the link between rain and destruction, a link that allows him
to introduce in the very first chapter destruction from a source other
than the war—the cholera epidemic. His second technique is to rep­
resent virtually all the destruction of the war itself as impersonal. The
death of Catherine's first boyfriend is presented as just something
that happens in war. The shelling that kills Passini and injures Fred­
eric is associated not with any malicious Austrian general but with
the nature of things: go near the front and you may be blown up while
eating cheese. Similarly, the bullet that kills Aymo during the retreat
comes suddenly from some unspecified gun. The executions at the
Tagliamento are as much a sign of the breakdown of the Italian army
as they are a sign of the problems with the individuals carrying them
out. Hemingway's third technique is to use from time to time Cath­
erine's own articulations of her knowledge. The result is that by the
time Frederic articulates the world view in Chapter 34, we have been
accumulating evidence for it for some time. Since the evidence is gen­
erally easy to accept piece by piece, we are well prepared to accept
the grand conclusion.

At the same time, the "If people bring so much courage to this
world" passage itself is somewhat problematic. First, Frederic's depa­
ture from his normally flat "just-giving-the-facts" narration clearly
marks the passage as a set piece of Hemingway's and runs the risk of
appearing overwritten. In that respect, it is different from Frederic's
articulation of similar beliefs during the agony of Catherine's child­
birth. His "That was what you did. You died" commentary more
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clearly grows out of the immediate action. Second, the passage’s claim—absent from the later passages—that the world is not just destructive but selective in its decisions about whom to destroy first strains one’s credulity beyond the evidence of the narrative. Yes, Aymo appears to be one of the very good. And so does Catherine. And Passini too. But what about all the victims of the cholera? Or the soldier who bleeds to death above Frederic on the way to the field hospital? Or the men being executed at the Tagliamento? On the other hand, if we recall that Frederic expresses these thoughts immediately after he is writing about his happiness with Catherine, we can attribute this part of the generalization to his thoughts of her as very good, brave, and gentle. But the sense of the passage as a Hemingway set piece blocks that solution to the problem of overgeneralization. We are asked to see Frederic speaking for—indeed, with—Hemingway here. In summary, Hemingway’s artistry in leading up to this passage and those that come later works well to win his reader’s assent to the world view, though the passage itself is not fully successful in clinching the case. On balance, the artistic inducements for the flesh-and-blood audience to adopt Hemingway’s beliefs about the world, while not perfect, are sufficient for me to maintain my claim that Catherine’s functions connected with the communication of those beliefs are positive ones.

The best way to assess the ethics of Hemingway’s world view, I think, is to consider the apparent consequences it has for those characters who share it. And in examining its consequences for Catherine, we need to face the question of whether the belief in the world’s malevolence is connected with the sexist elements of the narrative. Is Catherine’s willingness to be subservient to Frederic because of her knowledge of the world just another sign of Hemingway’s automatic assumption of the subservience of women? We can better answer this question after a look at Count Greffi and the Frederic of Book V.

Hemingway uses his creation of Count Greffi to perform the synthetic function of showing his audience a character who lives with grace and dignity in the face of his own impending death. He would probably never make a speech such as Frederic’s “If people bring so much courage to this world,” but Hemingway lets him say enough so that the authorial audience can infer that his beliefs are similar to the later Frederic’s. Greffi says that he values most “someone I love,” that the war is “stupid,” that he values life because “it is all I have,” that he has expected to become religious as he has grown older “but somehow it does not come” (pp. 250–51). The ethical consequences of Greffi’s beliefs all appear to be positive: he is gentle, kind, and solicitous with Frederic; he doesn’t take himself too seriously yet he is content.
with who he is. In the face of his coming death, he goes on much as he always has, giving his birthday parties, playing billiards, drinking champagne, wondering if he will become religious. If Hemingway's beliefs about the world lead to this kind of behavior, then we ought to have no qualms about adopting them.

As the example of Greffi indicates, in considering the ethical dimension of Hemingway's beliefs about the world's malevolence, we are concerned both with the beliefs themselves and with his view of the proper responses to that malevolence. Like Catherine, Greffi performs the thematic function of indicating how to live with the knowledge of the world. He is an image of what Frederic might become in his old age. The Frederic we see in Book V is moving in this direction. He is content with the small things of his life, his equivalent of Greffi's billiards and champagne: he gets excited watching the hairdresser wave Catherine's hair; he loves to go riding along the country roads with her. More important, he treats Catherine more gently and solicitously than he ever has before. Again, while we could all easily imagine higher standards of ethical conduct than Frederic exhibits, the ethical consequences of Hemingway's beliefs all seem positive.

If, as these examples suggest, adopting the world view itself leads the male characters to be gentle and solicitous, to become like Catherine, then we can, at least to some extent, separate the beliefs about the world from the sexism. Neither is necessarily implicated in the other. In fact, the ethical consequences of Hemingway's beliefs about the world appear to lead one away from rather than toward sexism. Nevertheless, Hemingway's deeply ingrained assumption that women are subordinate to men does intersect with those beliefs, most visibly in the implicit messages about how men and women respond to them. Both Greffi and the later Frederic have a kind of independence that is never even presented as an option for the male-identified Catherine. The men can live in the destructive world without women, whereas the woman "naturally" turns to another man. Thus, Catherine's subservience is a point where two of Hemingway's otherwise independent views intersect: his portrayal of her subservience grows out of both his views of the relation of men to women and of how best to respond to the knowledge of the world's destructiveness. In that respect, this subservience is another instance of what I referred to earlier as the way in which reading Catherine's character can be dizzying in its complexity and contradictions. But this intersection of the beliefs and its consequences for the characterization of Catherine do not point to any negative ethical consequences of Hemingway's beliefs about the world; instead they once again show the negative consequences of the sexism and the way in which Hemingway's second-
nature assumption about the subordination of women to men infects the whole narrative.

Thus, as we move to the end of my story of Catherine's functions, we have good cause to evaluate positively her synthetic and thematic functions related to Hemingway's communication of his beliefs about the world, just as we have good cause to evaluate negatively the thematic functions related to his sexism. As a coda to the story, I would like to point out an interesting by-product of this final event, one connected not with the conflict between author and audience caused by the sexism but rather with potential conflicts caused by different beliefs about the nature of the world.

If my analysis in this last section holds up, then we can understand why flesh-and-blood readers whose beliefs about the world are considerably more optimistic than Hemingway's can still adopt his and be moved by the narrative. Such readers do not simply give in to the narrative illusion—and they do not end up hating themselves in the morning—because they are very likely not only to accept but to admire (and perhaps even aspire to) the ethical consequences Hemingway draws from that world view. In other words, both existentialists and fundamentalists can enter Hemingway's authorial audience without compromising their ethical standards. At the same time of course, fundamentalists will find themselves resisting the bald statement of the world view, but the very experience of being moved by the narrative can establish a very productive relationship with it, one arguably more productive than that of the existentialists who will merely have many of their beliefs reinforced. The combination of intellectual resistance and emotional suasion has the potential of making one rethink—and rejustify or reject—one's own world view.

For another variation on the same phenomenon, consider the feminists who are opposed to marriage and in love with Jane Austen's novels. The potential for conflict between author and readers there is of course initially reduced by Austen's concern not with marrying per se but with marrying for the best. Thus, the ethical dimension of reading *Pride and Prejudice* or *Emma* involves measuring the characters (and to some extent oneself) against the ethical norms of the narrator, norms which are at once appealing and challenging. For readers opposed to marriage as an institution, the marriages themselves may become incidental to the core experience of following the carefully nuanced, yet clear, ethical paths that the heroines eventually walk. For others, of course, the conflict between the ethical dimension of reading and the value Austen places on marriage may be too great to overcome. But again, for some subset of those readers that conflict can be very productive.
Not surprisingly, then, the rhetorical consequences of resisting reading will be likely to vary from narrative to narrative. The act of repudiating a narrative more fully than I have done here may be relatively empty if the repudiation is easy and dependent on an inadequate reconstruction of the narrative's design. The resistance is empty because there is little genuine encounter between the text and the reader. Even if the reconstruction is careful, the repudiation may be relatively unsatisfying if the ethical basis of the work is easily rejected. In such cases the degree of satisfaction will be at least partially dependent on the cultural status of the repudiated text: repudiating Faulkner is likely to be more satisfying than repudiating Ferber. Resistance is more likely to be satisfying and productive when it is partial, when we find ourselves in genuine disagreement with some parts of a work without entirely losing our respect for it. In these cases, we talk with the text and its author more as equals, acknowledging their power, but for that very reason, required to think hard about the nature and meaning of their limits. The dialogue established in these encounters can go on for a long time and can lead us to rethink some of our most fundamental commitments and beliefs.