THE THESIS PHASE
A Hospitalized World: *A Farewell to Arms*

Like *The Scarlet Letter’s* scaffold, *Anna Karenina’s* railroad tracks, *Bleak House’s* court of chancery, *A Passage to India’s* caves, *As I Lay Dying’s* coffin, *Confidence Man’s* riverboat, *Huckleberry Finn’s* raft, and *The Old Man and the Sea’s* skiff, *A Farewell to Arms’* hospitals are central to many of its events. And whether in an ambulance, aid station, or hospital, Hemingway’s hero and heroine are never far from the flag that waves above their actions—the Red Cross. Admittedly Hemingway’s World War I experiences partly determine hospitals as the novel’s chief stage property. But were the novel truly dictated by personal experience, then Frederic Henry would not have been wounded as an officer of an ambulance unit but rather as Hemingway had been, as a *cantinier*, doling out sweets, tobacco, and postcards to Italian troops.¹

Esthetic considerations must have been among Hemingway’s reasons for altering the facts of his own experiences. The medical duties of an ambulance officer and a nurse lend greater plausibility to Frederic’s love story than had Frederic been a *cantinier*. And his medical status makes inconspicuous the hospitals, which unify the plot’s action: Frederic and Catherine meet in the hospital in Gorizia, reunite and consummate their romance in the Milan hospital, and separate in the Lausanne hospital. And the alteration from *cantinier* to ambulance officer allows the ubiquitous image of the Red Cross to unify the novel’s settings and to urge the inevitability of its conclusion: from Frederic’s compatriot’s hernia to Catherine’s fatal hemorrhage the novel’s steady tattoo of injury and ailment prepares for calamity. That Red Cross banner even invites the ironic view that Frederic and Catherine’s Swiss idyll is less pastoral romance than medical reciprocity. That is,
since the Swiss flag inverts the colors of the Red Cross flag, it
could be argued that as Catherine nursed Frederic through his
convalescence in Milan, he inverted their relationship in Switzer­
land, nursing her through pregnancy—almost.

As a stage property, hospitals generate more than esthetic felici­
ties. They indicate that Hemingway’s principal subject is not war
and love but wounds. Whether caused by war, family, or accident,
and whether physical, emotional, spiritual, or psychological,
wounds define the world of this novel: injury ridden. The tradi­
tional “physician” for such wounds, the priest, can poorly admin­
ister to the needs of such a world. Yet equally ineffective are the
surgeons, medics, and nurses who work in the novel’s hospitals
and care for injured bodies. Their anesthetics, operations, dress­
ings, and therapy cannot prevent that most normal of human
functions—the cycle of reproduction—from going terribly awry.
Neither can they cure the wounds that accompany Frederic when
he walks away from the hospital at the novel’s end. Symbol of the
clean, well-lighted place to which modern man turns in the hope of
being made whole, Hemingway’s hospitals seem small improve­
ment over the institutions they historically replace, churches.

Unlike Sinclair Lewis’s hospitals, which expose the abuses of
the medical profession in Arrowsmith, or Thomas Mann’s sana­
torium, which completes the education of his hero in Magic Moun­
tain, Hemingway’s hospitals cannot heal the deeper injuries
common to the human condition. But their failure is symptomatic
of the failure of any system that offers or allows the illusion that it
can give humankind health, order, meaning, or significance. In
short, the thesis of A Farewell to Arms is that no institution, be­
lief, system, value, or commitment can arm one against life’s utter
irrationality. Recognizing this thesis clarifies the novel’s struc­
ture, my first concern. It also explains why and when Frederic
narrates his story, the characters of both Frederic and Catherine,
and the aptness of their fantasy-driven romance, my second set of
concerns. And it explains some reasons why Hemingway wrote
the novel, one of the concerns of my afterword.

The sequence of Frederic Henry’s major decisions reveals both
his awareness of life’s irrationality and the novel’s underlying
structure. His decision that family and country offered him no
meaningful value is borne out by his disparaging references to the
former and by his expatriation from the latter. His decision to stop
studying architecture in Italy indicates that it obviously failed to
satisfy his needs too. But that pursuit, however brief it may have been, also indicates that initially he decided to study a profession concerned with design, formal order, and tangible structures. Frederic is offhanded about his joining the Italian army and getting assigned to an ambulance unit. Yet except for medicine, no profession theoretically requires more discipline, regimentation, and obedience to orders than the military. That fact may underlie Frederic’s decision to enlist, for it shows his continued search for order.

The opening chapters of the novel indicate that Frederic has served for more than a year, so he has been in the army long enough to know the gap between the military’s theoretical order and reality. Futility, then, not irony, propels his remark that medicine stops the cholera epidemic only after seven thousand men die. And Catherine sees that the Italians occupy a “‘silly front’” (20), dismantling any elevated notion of military rationality. Frederic notes early how ridiculous it was to carry a pistol that so sharply jumped upon firing that one could hit nothing (29). During the retreat later he sarcastically thinks that it is only as disorderly as an advance (188). Although Frederic falls in love with Catherine during his Milan convalescence, it is not until his next major decision, to desert the army at the Tagliamento, that he also decides to commit himself to her, seeking order and meaning now in their intimate relationship. Her death, of course, insists that nothing can immunize her against irrational forces. Neither science and Rinaldi’s medical skill, nor faith and the priest’s prayers, nor love and Frederic’s care—none of these can keep her alive. Hemingway’s borrowing the novel’s title from that of George Peele’s poem, then, is ironic, for he rejects the poem’s conviction that “duty, faith, love are roots, and ever green”—that they offer meaningful value.

While deciding at the Tagliamento to commit himself to Catherine, Frederic makes two other decisions: to eschew thought and the processes of reasoning, and to seek order through his senses and the processes of nature. He tells himself that he was made not to think but to eat, to drink, and to sleep with Catherine (233).

Frederic’s justification for the former decision rests upon more than the travesty of rationality he hears the battle police at the bridge declaim. After all, the military landscape abounds in irrationality. Pleasure palaces on the front lines? An offensive campaign in the mountains? Gas masks that fail to work? An ambulance unit of anarchists? Bridges not blown to slow the German
offensive? Medals of honor for victims of accidents? No less irrational is the social landscape Frederic portrays. Were it not for the pain in his legs, his arrival at the Milan hospital would be Chaplinesque: an unkempt nurse, unprepared rooms, unmade beds, unanswered bellcords, and an absent doctor. Puzzled and angry he asks how there can be a hospital with no doctor (87). Just as the fixed horse races violate one activity over which chance and unpredictability should rule, so too do Frederic and Catherine violate the idea of a hospital: their romance transforms a ward for physical suffering into a haven of sensual gratification. The "comic opera" of their interrogation by the Swiss police at Locarno further justifies Frederic's derision of reason, aped as reason is by absurd civil formalities. His refrain throughout the last third of the novel, then, that he does not want to think, does not reflect a wish to escape or delay responsibility. It expresses his belief that thinking is a poor remedy for human problems.

Frederic's decision to embrace sensory experience and nature's processes is just as poor a remedy. Nature is no more orderly, controllable, or predictable than reason. Frederic's shrapnel-filled legs fail to raise his temperature. But Miss Gage patronizingly tells him that foreign bodies in his legs would inflame and give him a fever (85). Contrary to Miss Van Campen's belief, he cannot keep from contracting jaundice. Neither can Catherine prevent conception, assuring Frederic that she did everything she could, but that nothing she took made any difference (138). More to the point, Catherine's narrow hips thwart nature's reproductive cycle. And the umbilical cord, rather than nourishing fetal life, becomes a hangman's noose. At the novel's end neither spring nor rain will bring their normal regeneration.

The British major at the club in Milan tells Frederic how to respond to their world: "He said we were all cooked but we were all right as long as we did not know it. We were all cooked. The thing was not to recognize it" (133–34). Stripped as Frederic has been of virtually everything that would give him reason to continue living, when Catherine dies he cannot avoid seeing that he too is "cooked." And that prompts his next-to-last decision, to tell his story.

Frederic's motive for telling his story is elusive. If his motive is altruism, then as an ex-ambulance officer he may believe that to cure such a "cooked" world first requires diagnosing its condition and that telling his story will do that. If his motive is vindictive-
ness, then he may sadistically want to force others to see that they too are “cooked.” If it is self-pity, then he may hope that telling his story will console himself and justify his apparent callousness. If his motive is self-aggrandizement, then he may feel that telling it will gain our admiration. If it is objectivity, then he may simply be telling it “the way it was.” His motive, however, is revealed by his narrative manner, which leads me to three conclusions that I take up in reverse order. His manner reveals that he is disoriented by what has happened to him and so is an untrustworthy narrator; that he tells his story soon after Catherine’s death; and that if he can discover in his story meanings that will nurture a desire to continue living, then his motive has been therapeutic. If not, then his motive has been testamentary: his story will explain his last decision—to commit suicide.

_Farewell_ presumably conforms to the tradition of the _Bildungsroman_. Charting Frederic’s development, the novel teaches that he grows by learning something: neither to “say ‘farewell to arms’” nor to “sign a separate peace” but to “live with life,” to “tolerate it”; “to become eventually quite strong” by being broken; to become “humanely alive” by caring for Catherine and saying “farewell to ‘not-caring-ness’”; to reject eros for agape; to value life by discovering death and the “step-by-step reduction of the objects” he had found meaningful. These statements about Frederic’s “growth” assume that at the time he writes his story Frederic-the-narrator understands the significance of what has happened to him. Moreover, they assume that he has been chastened by experience and so will be a better person morally than he was at the beginning of his story. Most importantly, they assume that Frederic goes on living after he has told his story. And so they imply that Frederic’s motive has been therapeutic.

Slightly modifying the end of Frederic’s most anguished internal monologue, I ask, “‘But what if he should die? Hey, what about that? What if he should die?’” (321). The well-known “original” ending to the novel finds Frederic alive “and going on with the rest of my life—which has gone on and seems likely to go on for a long time.” But that staccato of negatives—nos, nothings, and nots—in Hemingway’s splendid revision courts a different conclusion. Frederic’s decisions have shown him turning to—but finding no life-sustaining meaning in—family, country, profession, religion, duty, reason, nature, or love. Having found only life’s irrationality, Frederic would more likely decide now to commit suicide than to go on living an utterly hollow life. He is likely to tell
himself the same thing he tells the dog sniffing the garbage cans, that there is nothing (315).

Whether Frederic goes on living or commits suicide is, of course, unknowable. But that fact cautions against predicting moral conduct from him now that Catherine is dead. Indeed, to confirm any of the statements about what Frederic learns and how he will now behave requires knowing what he does after he returned in the rain to the hotel (332). Clearly, he tells his story. But what does he do after he has told it? No Marlow, David Copperfield, Nick Carraway, or Jack Burden, Frederic gives no epilogue and scarcely any glimmer of where or to whom he tells his story. But Frederic does indicate when he tells it. He tells it shortly after Catherine’s death.

We have long been schooled to conclude the opposite: as narrator, Frederic “speaks from a position several years remote from the occurrence of the action he describes”; and “the entire warm and loving story that constitutes the novel [is] a story told years after its occurrence.” To be sure, Frederic gives the impression that some years have elapsed by referring to “the late summer of that year” or by remarking, “We had a lovely time that summer.” And his essayettes, like those on abstract words or on how the world breaks everyone, reveal an eye steadied by time. Even his recall of Catherine seems to indicate narrative distance when, in a two-paragraph sequence, he recounts how he took down her hair as she sat quietly on his bed, dipping down suddenly to kiss him as he took out each hairpin and lay it on the sheet, dropping her head to let her hair cascade over him when he removed the last two pins, then, later, twisting it up and letting the light from the doorway draw out its shining luster (114). The second paragraph of this representative and lyrical reminiscence has the summarizing quality of a memory recounted several years after the events of the novel. But the first paragraph’s detailed immediacy is not a summary, does not generalize, is not brief. So recently had Frederic and Catherine gone through this ritual that he can reconstruct it, hairpin at a time. The paragraph’s evocative recall has the quality of wish to it: to conjure the scene fully may dispel the reality of Catherine’s death. And to savor the erotic pleasure he found in taking down her hair confesses the pain of no longer being able to repeat it, a pain that time would have lessened.

And Frederic’s essayettes: do they reveal an eye steadied by time, “slacken somewhat the objective tautness, the firm gaze upon outward reality, which is so characteristic of [The Sun Also
Rises]?” That is not their effect on me. They obtrusively, but fit-
ttingly, break the “illusion of continuous action” because Frederic
is unable to reflect calmly or maturely upon his experiences. His
essayettes self-pityingly complain against the world that breaks
everyone (249) and the “they” who throw one into a game, tell the
rules and then kill the first time they catch one off base (327). But
the essayettes are justifiable. Having just suffered physical, emo-
tional, and psychological injuries, Frederic lacks the composure
to control or suppress his feelings with the objective tautness or
firmness of Jake Barnes, whose injury considerably antedates his
story.

Let us briefly compare Frederic with the first-person narrator  of
“Now I Lay Me,” allegedly Nick Adams, to see better that Frederic
narrates his story shortly after it happens. Nick does two things
that measure the distance between himself as he tells his story
and himself as he was when an insomniac. First, he carefully dif-
ferentiates between then and now, gives a time frame. The open-
ing paragraph says, “So while now I am fairly sure that [my soul]
would not really have gone out [of my body], yet then, that
summer, I was unwilling to make the experiment” (Stories, 363;
italics added). The last paragraph also acknowledges that “he
[John, my orderly] came to the hospital in Milan to see me several
months after and was very disappointed that I had not yet mar-
rried; and I know he would feel very badly if he knew that, so far, I
have never married” (371; italics added). Second, Nick records,
outline-fashion, the “different ways of occupying myself while I
lay awake” (363). He refishes streams, recites prayers “for all the
people I had ever known,” and remembers “everything that had
ever happened to me” (365) or “all the animals in the world by
name” (367). Or he just listens. Both the time frame and the out-
line that shape Nick’s recitation of the sequence of his nocturnal
ritual are absent in Frederic’s story. But rightly so, for until time
gives Frederic some perspective upon his experiences, his narra-
tive will tend to lose its thread, as it does in this sentence:

That night in the mess after the spaghetti course, which every one ate
very quickly and seriously, lifting the spaghetti on the fork until the
loose strands hung clear then lowering it into the mouth, or else using
a continuous lift and sucking into the mouth, helping ourselves to wine
from the grass-covered gallon flask; it swung in a metal cradle and you
pulled the neck of the flask down with the forefinger and the wine,
clear red, tannic and lovely, poured out into the glass held with the
same hand; after this course, the captain commenced picking on the
priest. [6–7]
The more orderly narrators of "Now I Lay Me" or "In Another Country"—both of whom resemble Frederic—would not digress as Frederic does. They would delete the irrelevancies of how everyone ate and drank, and attend instead to the point: "That night in the mess the captain commenced picking on the priest." They might allow the phrase "after the spaghetti course," or at most the clause "which everyone ate very quickly and seriously," but no more.8

I exercise this issue of when Frederic tells his story because the novel hangs together best when heard on the heels of Catherine's death. To believe that considerable time has elapsed before he tells it invites the corollary conclusion: that the style of Frederic's story is "tough." Hemingway may be "a hard man who has been around in a violent world, and who partially conceals his strong feelings behind a curt manner."9 But can the same be accurately said of Frederic? Does he refuse, as Walker Gibson argues, to be concrete about such details as the year, the river, the plain, and the mountain in his opening sentence to insinuate an intimacy between himself and his reader? Does he imply that we, fellow insiders, know what he speaks of without requiring him to elaborate upon it? Does he fail to subordinate his ideas and to define causal relationships because he knows that we know that he knows that we know? Does he, for example, say, "There was fighting in the mountains and at night we could see the flashes from the artillery" (3), confident that we know that what he means to say is, "We knew there was fighting in the mountains, for at night we could see the flashes from the artillery"?10 To support my nays to these questions the terms of one of Farewell's most spirited detractors are excellent—although I adopt them for altogether opposite reasons. According to John Edward Hardy, in Frederic's "anonymous and crippled sensibility . Hemingway produces what seems to me a radically maimed prose, a style that does not simply reflect but is the victim of the spiritual malady that afflicts his characters."11

Both the "tough" and "maimed" labels judge Frederic's style upon the basis of the perennial illusion that Hemingway, a crippled tough, a sentimentalist masquerading behind he-man brusqueness, wants his reader to endorse Frederic's values, to emulate his conduct, and to imitate his style. Setting this issue aside for now, I turn instead to the descriptive accuracy of the label "maimed." It is because Frederic is maimed, defensive, and still feeling vulnerable—not because he is hardened—that he tells
his story in a "curt," "laconic," "close-lipped" style: the secure
can afford to be expansive. It is because Frederic is crippled that
he tries to retaliate with ironic indignation, not sophistication,
with understated emotion, not wit, as when he tells that the only
result of his contracting jaundice was that he was denied his leave
(145). It is because Frederic's recent experiences make him skepti-
cal of reason and causality that he avoids subordinating his
ideas. And it is because he is preoccupied with his feelings and
experience, rather than with our understanding, that Frederic is
an inconsiderate, and ultimately an untrustworthy, narrator.

Frederic is inconsiderate of the audience who hears his story
because he is mentally disoriented, so preoccupied with his recent
injuries that he is unaware that his listener is unfamiliar with the
details of his life. Frederic ignores the amenities of formally intro-
ducing himself—"Call me Ishmael"—not to presume quickly
upon the reader as insider, but because when he begins his story
he is unsure of who he is. When his fictional predecessor, Jake
Barnes, began his story, he already knew who his scapegoat was;
even the deleted first chapters of his novel had similarly an-
nounced, "This is a novel about a lady." But Frederic cannot
begin by focusing on the person most important in his story.
Sorely wounded, he avoids touching directly its most tender spot,
Catherine. He keeps her offstage until his narrative is into its
fourth chapter, enough time for its anesthetic, as it were, to take
effect. Guilt, severe emotional stress, and paranoid tendencies
also explain Frederic's reluctance to identify himself. Ferguson
and Catherine call him "Mr. Henry" once each in chapters 5 and
6. But whether Henry is his surname or his Christian name is un-
clear. Nor is it clarified when his name gets joked about during the
second mess scene, whether his name is Frederico Enrico or En-
rico Frederico (40). Rinaldi only once calls him Federico (76), on
the eve of his departure to Milan. Not until Miss Gage asks him
in book 2 what his name is does he divulge it: "'Henry. Frederic
Henry' " (84).

Many things demonstrate that Frederic is a disoriented and,
ultimately, untrustworthy narrator. For all of its poetry, the
much-praised opening paragraph to *Farewell* is confusing—as
any reader new to Hemingway and the novel will affirm. The
first sentence alone generates no fewer than seven unanswered
questions. And the following paragraphs fail to answer the ques-
tions of who the narrator is, where he is, why and what he is doing
there, and when these events are taking place. So ambiguous is
Frederic’s narration that we can even mistakenly think that he sees his friend the priest while sitting with a fellow officer rather than with a whore. The mess table riddles, allusions, jokes, and shadow games certainly convey the impression that this must have been the way it really was. And they advance the novel’s irrationality. But they also convey Frederic’s trouble with selecting, organizing, and discriminating between significant and insignificant details. So do his occasionally lengthy recordings of, say, the inebriated dialogue of Rinaldi and the major from the mess in the last chapter of book 1. More revealing of his disordered sensibility are soberly written sentences that need considerable rereading before sense emerges. Telling of Gorizia, for example, Frederic drones on in a 164-word sentence about its brothels, railway bridge, the destroyed tunnel, trees around the town square, tree-lined avenues, house interiors, street rubble, and visits by the small, long-necked, gray-bearded king in his automobile (5–6).

Most persuasive of Frederic’s disoriented sensibility is his confession that he cannot analyze or define his experience. In his only unequivocal reference to the time he is writing his story, he admits, “I tried to tell [the priest] about the night and the difference between the night and the day and how the night was better unless the day was very clean and cold and I could not tell it; as I cannot tell it now” (13; italics added). During revision Hemingway struck from the manuscript one of Frederic’s monologues with the same confessional thrust. As the third paragraph of chapter 12, Frederic comments,

I do not like to remember the trip back to Milan. If you have never travelled in a hospital train there is no use making a picture of it. This is not a picture of war, nor really about war. It is only a story. That is why, sometimes, it may seem there are not many people in it, nor enough noises, nor enough smells. There were always people and noises unless it was quiet and always smells but in trying to tell the story I cannot get them all in always but have a hard time keeping to the story alone and sometimes it seems as though it were all quiet. But it wasn’t quiet. If you try and put in everything you would never get a single day done. Also when you are wounded or a little out of your head or in love with someone the surroundings are sometimes removed and they only come in at certain times. But I will try to keep the places in and tell what happened. It does not seem to have gotten anywhere and it is not much of a love story so far but it has to go the way it was although I skip everything I can.

Given his theory of omission, it seems reasonable that Hemingway deleted this confession because he was confident that Frederic’s narrative manner had already exposed his psychologically
crippled sensibility, that the explicit confession of his condition was inartistic.\textsuperscript{16}

Admittedly Frederic has long stretches of narrative—like the retreat—that exhibit little, if any, disorientation. But I do not contend that he is totally disoriented. After all, once he gets into his narrative its chronology coheres, his characters gather consistency, and even his use of details loses ambiguity, as a comparison of the first chapters of books 1 and 3 shows. No "diary of a madman," Frederic's story holds firmly enough to external reality to compel empathy. He is "one of us," not a clinical case. His disorientation, his being "a little out of [his] head," then, waxes and wanes, just as his regard for the priest seesaws against his affection for Rinaldi.

Not to see Frederic disoriented at all mandates the conclusion that Hemingway lacks esthetic distance from his narrator: Frederic's self-pity is Hemingway's. This view ignores Hemingway's early exposure to, and the influence of, writers who calculatedly created untrustworthy narrators to achieve esthetic distance. To discount the facts that Hemingway worked with and read writers like Ford, Stein, and Joyce and that one of his favorites was Conrad is to imply that Hemingway was an authorial naif. To deny his detachment from his characters also ignores Hemingway's early achievements in characterization. Surely one of his earliest discoveries was the importance of limited characters in fiction, characters perceptive enough about their experiences to engage readers emotionally, but just imperceptive enough to detach them simultaneously. Hemingway's justly acclaimed Nick Adams stories astutely maintain that tension between a youth's discerning intelligence and his obtuseness. Just think of "Three-Day Blow." Hemingway undercuts Nick's adolescent swagger and savvy by having him naively think he can resume his relationship with Marge and that it will be the same as before. To Nick's confident, "There was not anything that was irrevocable" (\textit{Stories}, 124), I hear the retort, "Isn't it pretty to think so?"

It is Hemingway's variation on this tension that makes Frederic an untrustworthy narrator. Perceptive enough to recount the decisions and events that have led him into a cul-de-sac, he is too disoriented, because he is emotionally unstrung, to confront and answer the many questions he generates. What was it, Frederic, that the priest had always known that you did not know and that, when you learned it, you were always able to forget (14)? And what happened, Frederic, between you and your family that caused your rift? And what are you going to do, Frederic, after
you've finished telling your story? And most of all, Frederic, was Catherine crazy? Or was she sane?

To see that Frederic is a "little out of his head" gives us a better view of both Catherine and the nature of their love. She is a poorly characterized heroine, as readers have long complained. More accurately, she is poorly characterized only if Hemingway's intent was to create a "round," richly complex human being. But I find little to support the idea that such an intent was among Hemingway's considerations. Some readers may wish to elevate Catherine to sainthood. But her fragile grasp of reality persuades me that Frederic loves a marginally neurotic woman who is more than a little out of her head.

I find it impossible to gainsay Catherine's addiction to fantasy. Her romantic dream of marrying her childhood sweetheart was interrupted by the war. But still she envisioned him arriving at the hospital at which she was stationed, cut by a sabre and sporting a head bandage or else shot in the shoulder: "'Something picturesque'" (20). By calling this a "'silly idea,'" she implies that when she found out that he had been blown to bits, her schoolgirl fantasies also disintegrated. Yet her responses to Frederic's romantic advances border on neurosis. During their second meeting she one moment scolds him for talking nonsense (26) and the next pleads that he be good to her, telling him that their life together will be strange (27). And their third meeting flips from "'Oh, darling, you have come back, haven't you'" (30) to "'You don't have to pretend you love me. That's over for the evening'" (31).

By the time Frederic sees Catherine in Milan he realizes, "I was crazy about her" (92). And so it is understandable that he resists the truth of his initial conclusion—that "she was probably a little crazy" (30)—by not contesting her later assertion that she is no longer crazy: "'When I met you I was nearly crazy. Perhaps I was crazy'" (116). Yet her desire to dwell amid fantasies does not abate. When he denies having slept with other women, she ironically tells him to keep lying to her, that she wants him to lie to her (105). But her avowals to obey his wishes, lacking that irony, are fantasy-driven, declaring that she will say and do and want, for "'there isn't any me any more'" (105–6). Frederic admits that they pretended that they were married, and when he presses the issue and tells her that he wants to marry her for her sake, the urgency with which she must cling to fantasy is unmistakable in her insistent—if not imper-
ious—reproach: “ ‘There isn’t any me. I’m you. Don’t make up a separate me’ ” (115).

Symptoms of her flight from reality are strewn throughout the novel. She conceals her pregnancy and denies that it worries her; but her insistence that Frederic not worry edges toward hysteria, confirming his impression that “she seemed upset and taut” (137). Possessive, she gets “furious” if anyone else touches Frederic. And she wants to be completely alone with him, rejoicing that they know only one person in Montreux, that they see nobody (303). Her wish to merge her identity into his, telling him that she desires him so much that she even wants to be him, exhibits psychological dependency, not selflessness. Paranoid, she initiates the two-against-the-others view that Frederic adopts later in the novel; when he assures her they won’t fight between themselves, she insists that they must not, for if anything were to come between them, then they would have no chance against the rest of the world (133). Her indefatigable cheerfulness is admirable. But it too signals a defensive reaction. When Frederic wants to discuss problems, she blithely disregards them just as she blithely tells her hairdresser in Montreux that she is pregnant with her fifth child or her obstetrician that she has been married for four years. Her final words are poignant. But they are completely in character, one last bit of fantasy, promising that she will come to spend the nights with him (331).

Frederic cannot ignore the fact that he loves a psychologically maimed woman. To her irrational fear of the rain he asks her to stop, adding that he does not want her to be “ ‘Scotch and crazy tonight’ ” (126). His last word here, “tonight,” rejects her wish to believe that she no longer has “crazy” moments. During the farewell scene in the Milan hotel before Frederic returns to the front, he records this exchange:

“‘I’m a very simple girl,’” Catherine said.
“I didn’t think so at first. I thought you were a crazy girl.”
“I was a little crazy. But I wasn’t crazy in any complicated manner. I didn’t confuse you did I, darling?”
“Wine is a grand thing,” I said. “It makes you forget all the bad.”

[154].

Frederic’s failure to answer her question, denying her what she wants to hear, recurs during their Switzerland “idyll.” He wakes one moonlit night to find Catherine also awake. She asks if he remembers how she was “nearly crazy” when they first met. He comforts her by admitting that she was “‘just a little crazy.’” She
then asserts that she is no longer that way, that she is "not crazy now" (300). Frederic's response, "Go on to sleep," can be tender, loving. But it does refuse to confirm her assertion, allowing us to conclude that perhaps she protesteth too much. And after she falls asleep, Frederic notes that he lay awake for a long time, thinking things over and watching the moonlight on Catherine's sleeping face (301). This suggests to me that it is a strain on Frederic to maintain the illusion of her sanity. Yet again, in response to Catherine's cheery jabber about cutting her hair and getting thin again and being "a new and different girl" and going together to get it cut or going alone and surprising him, Frederic registers that he "did not say anything" (304). Rather than implying masculine superiority to such concerns, his silence again implies weariness at having to support continuously Catherine's need for their "grand" romance.

Reluctant though Frederic is at times to nurse Catherine's delusion of sanity, he fears her mental relapse and tries to shield her. Just as he gives her the gas she needs during labor, he faithfully administers the medicine she needs to keep from cracking up. In one overdose of ardor he assures her that she is his "good girl," a "lovely girl," a "grand girl!" a "fine simple girl," and a "lovely girl" (153-54). And the banality of their love talk in Switzerland seems partly calculated by Frederic to give Catherine the narcotic she needs, the assurance that his love is unflagging, that he is content to be alone with only her, that their togetherness does not bore him, that "we're the same one" (299).

Though Frederic shoulders the psychological burden that Catherine's fragile mental condition imposes upon him, he should not get uncritical applause. After all, he too is psychologically dependent, needs her as much as she needs him. He tells her that he has a "fine life" (298). And he tells us that they had a "fine life" and were "very happy" (306), that not once did they have a "bad time" (311). But what prompts these statements is Frederic's need to convince himself of his happiness, just as his assurances to Catherine had been calculated to make her feel secure in his love. Hemingway deleted from the novel other passages of Frederic stepping out of his self-mesmerizing account of the sequence of events to reflect upon the nature of his relationship with Catherine. 20 But he does keep one of Frederic's reflections: "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" (249; italics added). Jake Barnes's sarcastic
“Isn’t it pretty to think so’” again tempts me. But that would miss the point of Frederic’s boast. Crediting it as fact and not wish, I think it measures the extent to which a crippled couple has retreated from even the reality of their own psychic individuality. Indeed their isolationism, their illusion of self-sufficiency, and their wish to make the convulsions of their erotic love the center of everything add up to a regressive withdrawal from reality. Frederic does not hide this fact, admitting that when reunited at Stresa they felt that they had returned home to be together and to waken in the night and find one another there, not absent: “all other things were unreal” (249; italics added). Summed up in Frederic’s “‘Let’s get back to bed. I feel fine in bed’” (251), their escapist fantasy amply proves that the object of their romantic love is to fend off reality, replete as it is with suffering and irrationality. “The weak side of this technique of living,” as Freud so cogently and poignantly noted, “is that we are never so defenceless against suffering as when we love [because we make ourselves dependent upon one other person], never so helplessly unhappy as when we have lost our loved object or its love.” The unhappy survivor of this defense against reality, a man neither innately strong nor confident nor supported by any traditional values, Frederic would have little reason to continue living once he has told his story, written his testament.