The Crisis of Masculinity, Reified Desire, and Catherine Barkley in *A Farewell to Arms*

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The tradition of critical response to Catherine Barkley in *A Farewell to Arms* is organized around conflicting poles. Since the book’s original reception, some critics have claimed that Barkley’s character is vitiated because she is an embodiment of male sexual fantasy. But Ernest Lockridge and Joyce Wexler, among others, have recently tried to rehabilitate Barkley, arguing that her effort to recuperate from the trauma of her fiance’s death through the ritualistic role-playing with which she initiates the romance with Frederic Henry shows her as subtly being the “prime mover” in the love story, and that her perseverance and loyalty in their love offer Henry an alternative version of heroism to the failure of the potential for heroism in war that he experiences. Clearly

2Ernest Lockridge, “Faithful in Her Fashion: Catherine Barkley, the Invisible Hemingway Heroine,” *Journal of Narrative Technique* 18 (1988): 170–78; Judith Wexler, “E.R.A. for Hemingway: A Feminist Defense of *A Farewell to Arms*,” *Georgia Review* 35 (1981): 111–23; Sandra Whipple Spanier, “Catherine Barkley and the Hemingway Code: Ritual and Survival in *A Farewell to Arms*,” in *Modern Critical Interpretations: “A Farewell to Arms*,” ed. Harold Bloom (New York, 1987), pp. 131–48. These critics exemplify the recent tradition of evaluating Barkley positively; for negative readings of her character, see Millicent Bell, “Pseudoautobiography and Personal Metaphor,” in Bloom, ed., pp. 113–30; Judith Fetterley, “Hemingway’s ‘Resentful Cryptogram,’” in Bloom, ed., pp. 61–75. That the text is male-centered and sexist is generally agreed. However, I suspect the intense critical debate that Barkley and Henry’s relationship engenders is due not only to the text’s sexism but also to societal anxiety over processes of sexual reification, which I will discuss as a context for the novel (a still-current anxiety, as suggested by recent controversies, including one within the feminist movement, around pornography).
the issue of heroism is central to the novel, and the view that Barkley represents a kind of heroism stands in stark contrast with an older critical account of her as merely a distraction or impediment to a quest by a male hero for transcendence. Thus we can sum up critical disagreement on Barkley by saying that her relation to heroism is problematic but her relation to sexuality is obvious, and indeed for some critics too much so. I wish to offer a perspective on Barkley and sexuality in the novel that suggests that her relation to sexuality is not obvious, and indeed that a historically informed consideration of the role of sexuality in the novel will allow us to think beyond the simple polarities that have structured our understanding of both character and novel.

Critics who see the Barkley relationship as a sexual fantasy overlook the degree to which the novel, rather than being simply a narrative of wish-fulfillment, thematizes the difficulties of sexual desire, particularly of male sexual desire. For instance, Barkley’s friend Ferguson remarks to Henry of his relationship with Barkley: “But watch out you don’t get her in trouble. You get her in trouble and I’ll kill you”; she also pressures Henry to let Barkley have some nights off, saying that she is tired. Similarly, Ferguson and Miss Gage warn him that the hospital superintendent, Miss Van Campen, has noted with disapproval his sleeping late, presumably due to his nighttime trysts with Barkley, and has called him “our privileged patient” (p. 110). Van Campen’s hostility to Henry, apparently fueled by her suspicions of his sexual relationship with Barkley, reaches a climax when she accuses him of malingering by provoking jaundice through excessive drinking. Henry’s response is to ask her if she has ever known a man to disable himself by kicking himself in the scrotum, “because that is the nearest sensation to jaundice and it is a sensation that few women have ever experienced” (p. 144). Faced with a feminine censure rooted in disapproval of his sexuality, Henry here hints that what Van Campen is attacking are his genitals, presumably because she lacks the masculine authority and masculine knowledge (of what jaundice is really like, for instance) that she would have if she were male. Whether through the friendly warning of Ferguson or the repressive disapproval of Van Campen, these scenes thematize an embattled sexual desire; the novel sympathetically depicts such desire, and the threatened masculinity it embodies, fending off threats posed by a feminizing social world.

What is at stake, significantly, is not love overcoming resistance; Henry comments early in his relationship with Barkley, “I knew I did

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3See, for instance, Robert W. Lewis, Jr., *Hemingway on Love* (Austin, TX, 1965).
4Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (New York, 1929), p. 108; all further citations will be in parentheses in the text.
not love Catherine Barkley nor had any idea of loving her” (p. 30). Initially, and to some degree throughout, the novel thematizes sexual desire surmounting difficulties. By making Henry a hero of embattled desire—desire embattled precisely by any effort to socially contain or restrict it—Hemingway implicitly defends what I will call reified desire. I use the word “reified” to mean a thing or process cut off or detached from social and communal networks or elaborations, from a context and associations that had once given it meaning. Sexual desire is often experienced in the 1920s as reified to a degree never seen before. As we saw in the scene between Henry and Van Campen, the tensions over Henry’s reified desire are also tensions about male identity and authority and about how a male physiological attribute can be used to establish masculine social identity. But Henry does not win his battle with Van Campen, who deprives him of his leave and hence of time to enjoy sex with Barkley. This scene is in fact a partial defeat for reified desire and for Henry’s assertion of a male authority founded on mere possession of a scrotum. Henry’s misogynistic and failed effort to construct masculine authority on the basis of physiology is proleptic of, and symptomatic of, the novel’s preoccupation with how the historically new experience of reified sexuality that it depicts and vindicates will provide a shaky foundation for an early twentieth-century version of masculine identity.

**The Remolding of Sex and the Crisis of Masculinity**

Social historians have identified the decade following World War I as a watershed in the emergence of a new vision of sexuality and a reformulation of the nature of gender divisions. Young people developed an increasingly autonomous sexual and recreational culture including sexually suggestive dancing and dating, a social practice that involved less direct parental supervision than the traditional “keeping company.” In this context premarital sexual experience became some-

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5For the development of the term “reification” see Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY, 1981), pp. 62–64. My use throughout of two related terms, “reification” and “rationalization,” may appear clumsy, but it is intended to draw attention to two aspects of a single process: reification suggests an atomizing process understandable as implicated in the atomizing logic of commodification and of the atomization of economic processes; at the same time, rationalization views the same process as a freeing of social activities, processes, and feelings from traditional constraints, which allows them to become goals of rational self-seeking, a development understandable as potentially liberatory. Jameson cites Taylorization (the “scientific” managerial mode of chopping work processes into small and measurable units) as a paradigm for reification; suggestively for my argument, experimentation with Taylorization became popular with American businesses in the 1920s.
what more acceptable, even for women; birth control became more accessible. Divorce became more common and forces of traditional moralism and prudery began to be derided as old-fashioned. These innovations involved an increasing acceptance of the fulfillment of sexual desire as an acceptable goal of rational activity and its expression outside of tightly channeled contexts (albeit in a limited degree) as socially more possible than heretofore. In offering a defense of a reified sexual desire, then, Hemingway’s text participates in a specific and historically contingent social and intellectual moment.

The period’s reformulation of sexual norms, however, was part of a larger historical pattern in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of converging norms for men and women, in education, employment, suffrage, sexuality, and even dress and public decorum (as represented by short hairstyles and public smoking for women). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have recently discussed how the early twentieth-century redefinition of gender boundaries generated a pervasive anxiety about masculinity in modernist writers; one social historian calls that redefinition a “crisis of masculinity.” These accounts suggest that the deep unease about the nature of masculine identity of this period was due to a larger late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century recomposition of ideals of masculinity associated with changing economic and political structures, which caused the material basis for the masculine ideals of the nineteenth century to be eroded.

Throughout the nineteenth century, masculine ideals had stressed

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6See John Modell, Into One’s Own: From Youth to Adulthood in the United States, 1920–1975 (Berkeley, CA, 1989), pp. 67–120; John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America (New York, 1988), pp. 239–79. Just as processes and desires can be reified, so too can a period’s characteristic concepts encapsulate a reified experience of the world. Fredric Jameson cites abstract desire, as postulated by Freudian theory (which detaches desire conceptually from any particular social context, socially acceptable goal, or authorizing environment), as a striking instance of conceptual reification (pp. 64–66). Freudian theory first achieved intellectual prominence in America in the 1920s, the decade of A Farewell to Arms, perhaps in part because its conceptual reification of desire in general was particularly acceptable to contemporary American taste, with the increasing reification of sexual practices and desires and their detachment from restraining forces that had channeled them in earlier periods.

7See the conclusion of Mark C. Carnes, Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America (New Haven, CT, 1989); this trend is also discussed and documented in Modell.

personal autonomy as the sine qua non of masculine identity; the characteristic tendency of parents and popular literature to urge boys to confront and master fear was synecdochic of a more general male socialization in strenuous independence and mastery of self and of environment.\(^9\) This masculine norm in socialization seemed necessary to an economy characterized by ideals (and a substantial reality) of entrepreneurial, upward class mobility and an intensely competitive industrial capitalism. The late nineteenth century saw this economic and political environment dissolve. For workers, the decades of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw capitalists' atomizing employment strategies and their aggressive assault on worker's organizations and skill monopolies giving employers unprecedented leverage in the workplace.\(^10\) For the middle class also, earlier ideals of independence and autonomy were undermined. Economically, the decline of the traditional petit bourgeoisie, the growth of office work, and the replacement of medium-sized firms by vast corporations and monopolistically organized industries reduced the middle-class individual's sense of autonomy. These broad social trends generated a disruption of an earlier masculine ideal of stout independence, helping to produce in response a compensatory middle- and upper-class idealization of sport and war as a source of secure masculinity, a trend that, given his obsession with violent sports and war, is clearly a major influence on Hemingway.\(^11\) His preoccupation with these activities suggests the centrality of a beleaguered masculine identity for his work, as we see how heavily he draws on late-nineteenth century strategies to bolster masculine identity; *A Farewell to Arms*’ juxtaposition of thematics of masculinity and of confronting death and war rewrites a nineteenth-century classic such as *The

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\(^10\)David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards, and Michael Reich, *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States* (New York, 1982), pp. 100–164. Gordon and his coauthors' argument that the early twentieth century saw the rise to dominance of a "homogenizing" type of labor process, characterized by the reduction of many jobs to "detailed, atomized, semiskilled operations" (p. 101), supports my view, developed below, of the importance of reifying processes in social life generally in this period.

Red Badge of Courage, with its focus on proving manliness through facing the rigors of battle.

Much criticism of Hemingway tends to psychologize his preoccupation with masculinity, seeing it as deriving from his personal development; but the preoccupation has determinants in the broader economic and political spheres. In addition to the economic forces mentioned above, Hemingway's formative years saw other subversions of the nineteenth-century ideal of masculine independence in the political sphere. In the early twentieth century the popular and partisan politics of nineteenth-century America became eroded, as voting was discouraged by elites and popular political participation declined. Similarly, in World War I, the masculine experience of war was itself so transformed by technology as to overwhelm notions of war as a site of individual masculine achievement. Yet paradoxically, massive propaganda organized by an increasingly powerful state glorified the war and rallied public support around wartime mobilization.12 This discrepancy between the lived experience of war as an inadequate realization of masculine ideals and the apotheosis of war by a state that itself ominously overshadowed any individual male's autonomy is a major context for Hemingway's portrayal of war. It reveals how his obsession with masculine identity is in part a response to a chastened sense of the diminished degree of male autonomy in economic and political life.

We see signs of the link between the increasing concentration of social power and the corresponding fragility of male identity in Hemingway's frequently expressed violent distaste for propaganda. A Farewell to Arms repeatedly expresses disgust at propagandistic accounts of war. In Hemingway's autobiographical early story, "Soldier's Home," such propaganda is revealed as undercutting the veteran Krebs's sense of the authenticity of his own wartime action, and hence of an important source of male identity:

Later he felt the need to talk but no one wanted to hear about [the war]. His town had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities. Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie, and after he had done this twice he, too, had a reaction against the war and against talking about it. A distaste for everything that had happened to him in the war set in because of the lies he had told. . . . Krebs acquired the nausea in regard to experience that is the result of untruth or exaggeration, and when he occasionally

met another man who had really been a soldier and they talked a few minutes in the dressing room at a dance he fell into the easy pose of the old soldier among other soldiers: that he had been badly, sickeningly frightened all the time. In this way he lost everything.13

Here wartime action, a traditional source of male identity, has its authenticity as recounted experience vitiated by state-sponsored propaganda, with its capacity to define the categories of experience (“too many atrocity stories”). By undermining a source of masculine identity, such propaganda—and ultimately the state that sponsors it—renders impotent and redundant the achievement of masculine identity through personal experience of war. Hemingway’s understanding of the implication of an ominous state in threatening masculine identity is powerfully evoked in the most melodramatic moment in A Farewell to Arms, when Henry is forced to desert the Italian army to avoid being shot by military police, agents ironically of the very state he is serving.14

Indeed Hemingway’s characteristic distaste at inflated and deceptive rhetoric can be seen as offering a rationale for his reticent prose style, an implicit critique of propagandistic rhetoric. At the same time, this laconic prose style mimics a masculine emotional reticence now understandable, amidst the redefinition of gender boundaries of the period, as perhaps arbitrary but needing all the more to be insisted on, for that. As in the scene quoted above (“he felt the need to talk... he fell into the easy pose of the old soldier”), Hemingway sees the restrictive way in which masculine rituals can impede the fulfillment of men’s need for openness, yet he resists abandoning the rituals and codes upon which a vulnerable masculinity is founded. In A Farewell to Arms the conflict between the newly perceived arbitrariness of masculinity—with its concomitant experience of masculinity as a lack of “feminine” potentialities for men of emotional openness and intimacy—and Hemingway’s stubborn commitment to masculine codes is resolved through an aestheticization of masculine experience. Hemingway celebrates masculine codes, yet expresses obliquely as well a masculine longing for other


14Since the posthumous publication of Hemingway’s The Garden of Eden, with its overtly transgressive sexual dynamics, critics have shown great interest in Hemingway’s awareness of the fragility of gender boundaries. In particular, my efforts to historicize Hemingway’s preoccupation with masculinity owe a debt to Mark Spilka, Hemingway’s Quarrel with Androgyny (Lincoln, NE, 1990), which stresses the personal influences on Hemingway that encouraged his resistance to such redefinitions; for another recent discussion of these issues, see J. Gerald Kennedy, “Hemingway’s Gender Trouble,” American Literature 63 (June 1991): 187–207.
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types of experience, which a traditional masculine identity—now felt as arbitrarily desiccated and inexpressive—precludes. This groping for an aestheticization of masculine experience helps explain the importance in the novel of the feminine role embodied in Barkley.

**The Celebration of Reified Desire**

Henry's emphatic detachment from the propagandistic glorification of the war is but one symptom of one of the novel's central themes: Henry's experience of war as a failed effort to shore up a problematic masculinity. More than once in the early part of the novel Henry is asked why an American is fighting with the Italian army. He gives evasive replies, suggesting that the answer is too close to the core of his personality to be easily expressed. Since Henry reveals no alternative reason for having entered the war, such scenes hint that Henry entered the army simply to establish his manhood through the quintessential masculine activity of war. There are other signs of his preoccupation with manliness, such as his willingness—despite evident ambivalence—to go with Rinaldi to the brothel, another traditional rite of masculine initiation, and his frustration on finding that his role in the war effort is not heroically vital: “Evidently it did not matter whether I was there or not” (p. 16). But both his refusal to acknowledge his motives for enlisting and his friendship with the priest, whose celibacy and masculinity are derided by the other officers, suggest the vulnerability of Henry's quest for masculinity. And the irony that dominates the war portions of the novel is that this quest is a failure. His injury, Henry points out, occurs while he is eating cheese; traditional notions of glory and patriotism seem irrelevant. Thus if many men in this period felt masculinity to be in crisis, the novel powerfully implies that the traditional heroism of battle is no longer available as a secure source of masculine identity. The climax of this ironic stance toward war is the moment during the disastrous Caporetto retreat of Henry's desertion; and at this point a passage of internal monologue illustrates how war has become for Henry conflated with the classic male experience of emasculation in civilian life, losing one's job: “You had lost your cars and your men as a floorwalker loses the stock of his department in a fire. . . . If they shot floorwalkers after a fire in the department store because they spoke with an accent they had always had, then certainly the floorwalkers would not be expected to return when the store was opened again for business. They might seek other employment” (p. 232). The language here, by conflating the traumas of military service with employment insecurity, suggests that in this period impersonal social forces such as employers are seen as subversive of masculine autonomy.
In this context the role of Henry's relation to Barkley, as an embodiment of reified desire, is to offer an alternative conception of a basis for masculinity. By pursuing with Barkley a reified desire, Henry tries to embody in the expression of sexual desire and in the control of a woman's body the masculinity that he has been unable to achieve in war. The very character of the desire allows it to be a surrogate for a faltering ideal of masculine independence (both Henry and Barkley see the early part of their relationship as a "game" [pp. 30–31], underscoring its implication in the ethos of sports or games as a way of proving masculinity). Significantly, for both Henry and Barkley, desire is reified and detached from larger contexts that previously would have channeled it. Though middle-class themselves, in their relationship they dispense with conventional restraints on middle-class courtship, such as parental approval or chaperones; Barkley's friend Ferguson leaves them alone on their second meeting. Neither character has a family who matters to them, and indeed they assure one another that they will not have to meet the other's family. Even more striking, both Barkley and Henry have a detached relation to larger structures of authority and solidarity. Once her pregnancy poses a problem, Barkley mentions the possibility that "if necessary I'll simply leave" (p. 137), a comment that suggests a willingness to detach herself from the institutional setting of which she is a part. In this regard she leads the way for Henry, who deserts reluctantly from the army only when threatened by the danger of being shot by overzealous military police. Most obviously, and in contrast to Barkley's relationship with her fiancé, Henry and Barkley neither become betrothed nor marry. Nor, crucially, do they initiate their relationship to express love: Ernest Lockridge has convincingly made the case that the relationship is motivated, on Barkley's side, at least in part by an effort to recover from the trauma of the death of her fiancé. On Henry's part, the affair begins with simple desire and hence as an effort to secure mastery; after Barkley slaps him he thinks: "I was angry and yet certain, seeing it all ahead like moves of a chess game" (p. 26). So the novel both depicts and justifies a heterosexual relationship founded originally on reified desire, celebrating desire as such in a way only possible at this point in American history, when the salience of reified desire socially and ideologically permits it.

The war is a logical imaginative site for Hemingway to celebrate the emergence of reified desire because he, like many of his contemporaries, links the war with the disruption of an earlier, more genteel and idealistic way of being, and a new organization of gender and sexuality that disrupts earlier gender boundaries.15 Barkley, discussing her dead

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15Both Van Campen and Barkley are from "very good people" (p. 118), which empha-
fiancé with Henry, expresses regret that she allowed herself to be restricted by traditional restraints on sexual behavior: “He could have had anything he wanted if I would have known. I would have married him or anything. I know all about it now. But then he wanted to go to war and I didn’t know” (p. 19). Barkley’s elliptical reference to “anything” suggests her not fully verbalized but settled sense that the war has disrupted earlier restraining norms and made sexual freedom acceptable. But by rapidly informing Henry of her general detachment from conventional ideals, Barkley makes clear that the collapse of Victorian norms for courtship and love is part of a more general crisis of ideals precipitated by the war. Shortly after, she implies her disillusionment with the pieties of religion and of heroism in war. She says of her fiancé that “he was killed and that was the end of it.” Henry, as usual more willing than Barkley to give lip service to conventional pieties, objects, “I don’t know.” Barkley responds, “Oh, yes . . . that’s the end of it.” (p. 19). She contrasts her idealistic fantasy of wartime heroism as involving a “picturesque” sabre wound with what she now sees as war’s reality: “They blew him all to bits” (p. 20). Barkley perceives that, in the general disruption of the war, the older restraints on sexuality and courtship, like other Victorian illusions, have been blown to bits.16

By the time he wrote *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway had already taken note in his fiction of the war as a moment of reconstitution of gender and sexual boundaries. Through Krebs, the veteran of “Soldier’s Home,” he meditates on the war’s relation to social life generally. Krebs feels alienated from the new youth culture, defined by cliques of girls and novel hairstyles:

Nothing was changed in the town except that the young girls had grown up. But they lived in such a complicated world of already defined alliances and shifting feuds that Krebs did not feel the energy or the courage to break into it. He liked to look at them, though. There were so many good-looking young girls. Most of

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sizes the power of reified desire to disrupt genteel social norms. More generally, Paul Fussell has pointed out that many postwar literary responses to the war, like *A Farewell to Arms*, express disillusionment with lofty wartime ideals and with heroic glorification of battle; see Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York, 1975).

16For a reading that anticipates mine in seeing Barkley as a product of World War I and reviews the critical controversy over her, see Sandra Whipple Spanier, “Hemingway’s Unknown Soldier: Catherine Barkley, the Critics, and the Great War,” in *New Essays on ‘A Farewell to Arms’*, ed. Scott Donaldson (New York, 1990), pp. 75–108.
them had their hair cut short. When he went away only little girls wore their hair like that or girls that were fast.\textsuperscript{17}

Krebs feels the erotic attraction of the apparent blurring of lines between "good" girls and "fast" ones, which is symptomatic of the spread of sexual reification, but he also finds the independence of the girls threatening and chooses not to pursue any relationships, emasculated by the redefinition of gender boundaries: "He would have liked to have a girl but he did not want to have to spend a long time getting her. He did not want to get into the intrigue and the politics."\textsuperscript{18} The conflation here of sexuality and "politics" suggests that women now seem formidable agents of power, rather than passive objects to be pursued. Hemingway explores this ambivalent male response to the redefinition of gender boundaries more fully in the relation of Henry and Barkley.

The period's reification of sexuality was noticed by contemporaries, often with alarm, as was Hemingway's role in depicting it. The conservative critic Joseph Wood Krutch, writing in the \textit{Atlantic Monthly} a year before \textit{A Farewell to Arms} appeared, complained that the Victorian response to love, which he compared to a religion, had vanished along with traditional restraints on sexual experience:

That which the Victorians regarded as possessed of a supreme and mystical value was . . . a group of related ideas and emotional attitudes whose elements had, during a long period of time, been associated. . . . Analysis can dissociate them and has indeed done so, but in so doing it destroys the importance which only as a group they possessed. We know that the social consequences which once followed a surrender to love need no longer do so, and hence the nexus between the sexual act and those elements of the love complex which are predominantly social has disappeared.\textsuperscript{19}

For a traditionalist, the reification of sexual desire—the detachment of sexuality from its mooring in traditional social channeling and its corresponding demystification as a neutral goal of the individual's rational self-seeking—appears as a simple destruction of an important dimension of life. It is an emptying out of an accepted set of meanings linked to the word "love," which are remembered nostalgically as being fuller

\textsuperscript{17}Hemingway, \textit{In Our Time}, p. 92.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 93.
\textsuperscript{19}Joseph Wood Krutch, "Love—Or the Life and Death of a Value," \textit{Atlantic Monthly} 142 (1928): 205. Also relevant as evidence of Hemingway's identification as a disrupter of traditional values are the controversies over morality that erupted in response to \textit{The Sun Also Rises} and \textit{A Farewell to Arms}; this critical response is summarized in Scott Donaldson, "Introduction," in Donaldson, ed., pp. 1–25.
and richer than contemporary values. For Krutch the demystification of love was part of a larger collapse of traditional ideals, including "patriotism, self-sacrifice, respectability, honor" (a claim relevant to the demystifying response to these values in *A Farewell to Arms*). As the result of a spirit of rationalism, earlier ideals had been destroyed, wrote Krutch: "Rationalism having destroyed the taboos which surrounded love...it has been stripped of [its] mystical penumbra...[and] its transcendental value," and love had been reduced to mere copulation: "Love is becoming gradually so accessible, so unmy...
The centrality of reified desire for the novel lies not merely in its illumination of Henry and Barkley’s bond, but in how that bond is juxtaposed with the novel’s depiction of a number of reifying processes; the bond becomes a synecdoche for reifying processes in general, just as for traditionalists such as Krutch, anxiety about the “death” of love is part of a general sense that traditional values are in crisis. Reading the novel as a meditation on reification, not only of sexual desire but also of political and military experience, allows one to see this thematic thread in the war-centered part of the novel, which makes possible a link between the novel’s narratives of war and love.

Tensions around sexual reification and gender roles emerge even in the novel’s many scenes of male homosociality. Such tension contributes to the structural contrast in the early part of the novel between Henry’s two friends, the priest and Rinaldi, who are linked respectively with traditional ideals and modern cynicism. The priest, his own masculinity doubted by the other soldiers, fails as a role model for Henry. Although he does not join in ridiculing him, Henry shows his distance from the priest’s traditional ideals by his failure to accept his invitation to visit his home in Abruzzi. The more important influence, Rinaldi (a cynical doctor who introduces Henry to reified sexuality by taking him to a brothel), is associated with the modernizing spirit seen in Barkley. But just as the reified sexuality embodied in Barkley ultimately will undercut Henry’s masculinity, so too Rinaldi represents a threat to Henry’s Anglo-Saxon notion of masculinity. Indeed, at one point Rinaldi tries to kiss him, a gesture that Henry resists, presumably reading it as effeminate or incipiently homosexual. Rinaldi’s characteristic celebration of reified desire thus slips into a transgression of an Anglo-Saxon sense of male identity.

Rinaldi even grants that reified desire in its most stark form, in prostitution, ultimately limits male desire, paradoxically subverting male identity. Speaking of the prostitutes at the front he complains: “There are no girls. For two weeks now they haven’t changed them. I don’t go [to the brothel] anymore. It is disgraceful. They aren’t girls; they are old war comrades,” adding that “it is a disgrace that they should stay so long that they become friends” (pp. 64–65). Though Rinaldi’s comments certainly are evidence of his masculine insensitivity, he also expresses a paradox of reified desire; if continued, such desire inevitably must be-

23A racist tradition of American middle-class self-definition defined manliness as the capacity to restrain the passions, including sexuality, which supposedly dominated nonwhite or non-Anglo-Saxon males; this tradition further explains why Rinaldi’s influence implicitly subverts Henry’s sense of masculinity.
come elaborated into something more than a commercial (or quasi-commercial) transaction, thus undercutting the basis of masculine erotic desire, with its traditional valorization of an endless search for masculine "conquests" and of renewed domination over women. In an extreme and degraded form, Rinaldi's anxiety at the failure of sexual desire when the prostitutes become "friends" and "war comrades" anticipates the difficulty Henry will experience with Barkley. A masculine identity founded on desire must be cast into anxiety by a world in which reified desire is a normal state of affairs rather than an occasional transgression. In such a world, women, by sharing in the masculine province of such desire, have entered into a characteristically male experience and must be treated as equals; they become "war comrades."

Rinaldi suggests that the constitution of masculine identity around reified desire allows women a rough parity with men (as "war comrades") if they too accept such desire. The only alternative to this parity is to pursue reified desire's logic in a dominative, rather than erotic, direction, seeing women as targets for rape—a realistic possibility in the context of war, as suggested by the two virgins that Henry encounters in the Caporetto retreat. Henry and another soldier, Aymo, unintentionally frighten the girls and then try to reassure them: "'Don't worry,' he said. 'No danger of——,' using the vulgar word. 'No place for——.' I could see she understood the word and that was all. Her eyes looked at him very scared" (p. 196). Aymo's blunt vulgarity (he squeezes one of the girls' thighs) is part of the masculine acceptance of desire as reified and impersonal; the insensitivity generally associated with such masculine values can make all men appear as potential rapists. The ugliness of the scene for the reader and for Henry is in how violently the male world of reified sexuality disrupts a traditional masculine definition of men as protectors of women. Henry's acceptance of an insensitive masculine ethos of reified desire here finds its limits, as he asserts a common humanity with women and tries to reassure the girls.

The scene suggests the instability of reified desire as a basis for a mode of masculine behavior, for here it must be constrained by human sympathy, lest it be transformed into a purely dominative and animalistic mode. (This instability of a masculine role foreshadows the instability of Henry's masculine identity when he returns to Barkley.) But crucially, the scene, as a microcosm of the Caporetto retreat—the climactic wartime episode of the novel—links the sexual theme with the war theme. For just as Henry's efforts to maintain a traditional manly role as protector of women here are disrupted by his implication in a masculine ethos of sexual reification, so his later efforts in the Caporetto retreat to maintain traditional military norms of efficiency and decency—thereby proving manliness in the classic form of wartime achievement—are
frustrated by processes of reification in the political and military spheres. Thus the scene, in showing the limits of sexual reification, is proleptic of the more general political reifications that structure the retreat episode.

The crucial reification that emerges in this episode is of the relation of the individual to the state—a demystification of patriotism. Rinaldi extravagantly calls Henry the “American Garibaldi,” and, though hyperbolic, the phrase implies the commitment to the Italian state implicit in Henry’s situation. In the retreat episode, the value of loyalty to the state is revealed as a misreading, as the state is now seen as an inefficient and callous agent of class domination.

Although Henry is always distrustful of the state-sponsored propaganda that glorifies the war, he learns a new view of the state primarily from his fellow soldiers’ lack of commitment to the war effort and their disaffection from the government. Shortly before he is wounded, his mechanics offer a class analysis of the war in which the state is seen as an agent of an oppressive bourgeoisie and the war as a result of their domination: “There is a class that controls a country that is stupid and does not realize anything and never can. That is why we have this war. . . . Also they make money out of it” (p. 51).

The mechanics’ interpretation of the senselessness of the war is emphatically underlined when a shell hits Henry and his men soon afterward as they eat cheese. Later, during the Caporetto retreat, Henry enforces military discipline on a defiant officer by shooting him, and he allows one of his men to administer the coup de grace. The soldier is delighted to do so; Henry finds that his men are socialists, more eager to kill an officer than the enemy. Henry, by this point, has become implicated, though uneasily (when the men joke about killing the officer he does not laugh), in a radically demystified and rationalized view of the war and of the state. According to this rationalized view, the war is a business of the upper class, imposed by the state upon the poor, who accede to it as part of a strategy of self-preservation; if the exigencies of military discipline allow them to get their revenge on the officer class, they eagerly do so. When Henry deserts, he understands his action (as the passage about floorwalkers suggests) as a sort of personal strike against an irrational employing class; he has come, in large measure, to tacitly accept the rationalized view of the war and the state that the plebeian soldiers offer him. The overzealous military police, whose hyperpatriotism and brutality are foreshadowings of the overt class warfare of fascism that arises after the war, simply provide the occasion for Henry to act on this view.24

24See Sandra Whipple Spanier, “Catherine Barkley and the Hemingway Code: Ritual and Survival in A Farewell to Arms,” for draft evidence that Hemingway had fascism on his
If Henry learns to see the government in a rationalized way, his view of the war effort is reified in another sense, in that he constantly judges the Italian war effort by the narrow measure of its capacity to win. (He broods endlessly over whether the Italians will "crack" and repeatedly notes military inefficiency and dubious strategy.) Since his goals in the war are bound up with his own sense of masculine identity, he has an intense desire to be on the winning side or at least to do his job successfully, in a reifying response to life that is typical of a historical period when work is defined in increasingly atomized ways. But he constantly encounters evidence that the side he is on is not capable of being the winning side (at least on this front), hence not a secure basis for his masculinity. His preoccupation with whether the Italians can win involves an obsession with technique and method and almost entirely ignores the larger meaning of the war's ends. It is indeed his reifying preoccupation with getting the job done that makes him complicit in the ordinary soldiers' expressions of disaffection. When the mechanics worry about talking subversively in front of him, he reassures them: "'I know how you talk,' I said. 'But as long as you drive the cars and behave—'" (p. 49). Climactically, his effort to maintain military discipline in a hopelessly chaotic retreat by shooting the fleeing officer is the result of his stubborn commitment to a reifying logic of doing one's job and setting aside the larger moral issues. When he lets the soldier kill the officer, ironically he becomes complicit in another rationalized logic of self-interest pursued regardless of moral issues, that of class warfare. The logical end of Henry's reified pattern of thinking and of his focus on doing his job successfully is that his failure in the retreat to maintain norms of decency and efficiency, or even to achieve limited military goals, comes to signify for him the overall failure of the Italian front; the failure of the front becomes a justification for leaving the war effort. If one suspects, as Henry does, that the war cannot be won, given the force of class divisions splitting the military itself, then a reifying logic once more brackets the larger moral and political issues and compels an abstention from a losing cause; one is "out of it now" (p. 232).

At first glance, Barkley appears marginal to this war story. But in fact,
as an embodiment of reified desire and more generally of reification itself, she offers Henry the detachment from the illusions about the war to which he clings. She shows her detachment from the war by her suggestion that she may “simply leave,” and she fully supports, and indeed motivates, Henry’s decision to desert, to withdraw into a privatized world of sexual desire and fulfillment. When Henry feels emasculated and guilty because of his rejection of the masculine role of soldier, Barkley helps him to escape from this archaic ideal of the masculine:

“I feel like a criminal. I’ve deserted from the army.”
“Darling, please be sensible. It’s not deserting from the army.
It’s only the Italian army.”
I laughed. “You’re a fine girl. Let’s get back into bed. I feel fine in bed.” [p. 251]

Detached from traditional masculine ideals, Barkley facilitates Henry’s movement into a rationalized detachment from the war; sexual relations with her, an alternative basis of masculinity, restore his disrupted sense of masculine identity, making him “feel fine.”

Contemporary readers were disturbed by Henry’s desertion, as well as by the novel’s treatment of sexuality. Yet, similar to his treatment of sexuality, Hemingway’s rationalized, demystified depiction of the state as a callous institution complicit in a dynamic of class struggle is not merely personal but responds to a historical moment. His awareness of the underlying class dynamic of politics and the state, like his awareness of the reification of sexual desire, is a product of the war years and of the post-war period; events such as the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the wartime mutinies in the French army, the vast 1919 postwar wave of strikes in the United States, and the rise of Italian fascism sharply increased the salience of class conflict in modern society, making it easy to see the state in a rationalized manner as an impersonal agent of class struggle. It is one of Hemingway’s more daring moves to ask his readers to sympathize with a deserter from the Allied side in the Great War; but only in this way can he make clear the emptiness of earlier public versions of masculinity, thereby underscoring the high stakes in the novel’s love story and Henry’s attempts to secure his masculinity through his relationship with Barkley.

MASCULINITY SUBVERTED—AND PRESERVED

Quite early in the novel Barkley’s willingness to commit herself to Henry in a relationship premised on reified desire presages the subversion of Henry’s masculinity. When she gives him the medal of St. Anthony, it is a sign of her commitment; she has just asked him if he will come to see her
that night. When Henry puts on the medal, the narrator comments that it was lost when he was wounded. Since this is the first mention of Henry’s impending injury, the reader is forced to see Henry’s relation to Barkley as associated with his injury, which removes him from the front and vitiates his opportunity for masculine heroism.

In the early period of their relationship, Henry, adopting a traditional masculine eagerness to instrumentalize sexuality, accepts more fully than Barkley its constitution through reified desire, allowing him a certain control in the relationship. But in the hotel before he returns to the front, the surroundings and his impending departure make her fully acknowledge this aspect of the relationship. At first she complains that the setting makes her feel “like a whore,” but then abruptly she says that she is “a good girl again” (p. 152). She accepts that their relationship is founded on desire, which gives her a new degree of control in the situation, evidenced by her implicitly ironic comment that she is a “good girl.” From the standpoint of traditional sexual morality, Barkley’s reluctance to have sexual intercourse in a hotel room with Henry is a sign that she is, by background, a “good girl”; her willingness to do so would make her a “bad girl.” By reversing the expected meaning of the phrase “good girl” to mean good for the purposes of sexual desire, Barkley achieves the verbal control inherent in an implicitly ironic playfulness and suggests her ironic distance from and her autonomous rejection of traditional sexual norms.

But her achievement of this ironic distance allows her immediately to begin undermining Henry’s masculine authority in the scene, an authority predicated on his acknowledgment of his sexual desire and revealed in his verbal domination of their interaction. When Henry, later in this scene, quotes Andrew Marvell (“Time’s winged chariot hurrying near”), he tries to continue this domination and to romanticize their situation. The effort is consistent with his character, for his failed aspiration toward a heroic masculinity in war suggests that he tends to idealize experience and to imagine it unrealistically. Barkley, having accepted the sexual basis of their relationship, deflates Henry’s effort at idealization, thereby contesting his verbal mastery of the scene. While Marvell’s poem allows a privileged male stance for male desire in relation to a passive femininity, Barkley, having joined willingly in the experience of reified desire that makes her “like a whore,” is unwilling to accept the

26The characteristic male willingness to reify sexuality can be traced most obviously to the traditional sexual double standard. But for an effort to theorize an atomizing male sexuality as a function of masculine social roles in modern capitalism, see Alan Soble, Pornography: Marxism, Feminism, and the Future of Sexuality (New Haven, CT, 1986), pp. 55–94.
passive position that the allusion offers her. From her new position, she can verbally control the situation by refusing Henry’s inflationary rhetoric; she comments on the poem: “But it’s about a girl who wouldn’t live with a man” (p. 154). The comment deflates Henry’s rhetoric by pointing out the poem’s obsolescence and inapplicability to their situation: it also suggests her willing entry (in contrast to the traditional woman of Marvell’s poem) into the arena of sexual desire. Thus Barkley, refusing the powerless position of female passivity encoded in the Marvell allusion, reveals that Henry is clinging to illusions that she sees through, about the romantic basis of love and the clarity of gender boundaries, illusions that include feminine erotic passivity. As they prepare to leave, they say:

“Maybe I’ll be back right away.”
“Perhaps you’ll be hurt just a little in the foot.”
“Or the lobe of the ear.”
“No I want your ears just the way they are.”
“And not my feet?”
“Your feet have been hit already.” [p. 155]

Her desire for Henry to be wounded and leave the battlefield and her appreciative comments on the attractiveness of parts of Henry’s body (“I want your ears just the way they are”) suggest her new ease in hinting her own sexual desire, in sharp contrast to her revulsion before reified sexuality at the opening of the scene. (The blazon-like celebration of separate parts of Henry’s body actually puts him in the traditional feminine position in a characteristic masculine discourse about women’s bodies, of which the Marvell poem that Henry mentions is an instance; that the occasion is a discussion of his potential maiming underlines the emasculating potential of such seemingly innocent gender-role reversals.) But with her increased confidence in affirming her own desire, Barkley reveals a corresponding subversion of Henry’s masculinity, both in a general unsentimental awareness of the vulnerability of his body and in a distance from the valorization of masculine activities (such as staying on the battlefield) or of manly attributes (such as the phallic foot). Earlier Henry had exaggerated the importance of having a scrotum, only to be punished by Van Campen anyway; here Henry’s valorization of the phallic feet receives the deflating response: “Your feet have been hit already.” Thus in the course of the scene Barkley’s acceptance of reified desire as a basis for their relationship has allowed her to gain a new psychological and verbal control within it and to subtly suggest the limits of Henry’s pursuit of masculinity.

In the chapter that follows Henry is forced to give up a train seat to an obstreperous Italian because he has not played by the rules, which forbid
using a soldier to save a place. The position of this scene is telling. It is proleptic of the conflicts with Italians that Henry will have during the retreat and that ultimately lead him to desertion and the failure of his quest for manhood in war; but its placement, immediately after and causally connected with the preceding scene, suggests that as Barkley gains power in the sexual relationship with Henry, the relationship itself undermines his control of his fate and hence of his masculinity.

When the lovers have escaped to Switzerland the pattern of female assertiveness and concomitant subversion of masculine identity becomes more pronounced. Barkley refuses marriage when Henry offers it, once again rejecting a passive position in relation to his masculine initiative. She explains that before marriage she wants to appear "thin," which, though she implies that this is due to sexual shame, is an ambiguous desire, as thinness can also be seen as a sign of sexual attractiveness. Barkley refuses a traditional feminine role of wife here, with its attendant status and social affiliations, and instead is preoccupied with the possibility of a reified sexual desire embodied in a sexually attractive slimness. Admittedly, this founding of their relationship on sexual desire is not a stable position of status for Barkley; she wonders if "because I'm big now that maybe I'm a bore to you" (p. 298). But her refusal of marriage also prevents Henry from taking on a masculine role of husband. Similarly, her autonomous preoccupation with sexual desire deprives him even of the masculine position of sexual initiator. So as Barkley has achieved an autonomous sexual desire, she undermines Henry's efforts, already frustrated in war, to secure a masculine identity. Rather the lovers begin to compete for status in their relationship through the development of its initial premise of reified desire.

The logical endpoint of this tendency is Barkley's suggestion that Henry grow his hair and she cut hers so that "we'd both be alike" (p. 299). This plan, which implicitly blurs gender boundaries, seems to threaten Henry, who says that he likes her hair the way it is. Barkley's push for the blurring of the bounds of identity—"I want you so much I want to be you," she says (p. 299)—elaborates her acceptance of the basis of their relationship in reified desire. Henry, still uncomfortable with her effort to blur their separate identities, ripostes, "We're the same one," a comment that characteristically idealizes their relation. "At night we are," she responds (p. 299), referring to the time of untrammeled desire. Barkley wishes that their sameness in desire will erase their differences in gender identity. Her desire for transgressions of gender boundaries is a crucial part of the couple's situation late in the novel, and it anticipates postwar society's increased access to sexuality for women and blurring of gender boundaries. This new gender situation oppresses Henry, as, given the autobiographical character of the novel,
it probably did Hemingway. Confronted with changing gender roles, Henry admits to thinking often about the front and about Rinaldi; he feels a sense of loss at the disappearance of a more stable and traditional source of masculine identity in war.

There is an apparently irresoluble contradiction in the text, then, between Henry’s effort throughout the novel to recreate his own masculinity through desire and the insight that Barkley’s (or any woman’s) acceptance of desire as the basis of a relationship, by giving to women equal access to such desire, destabilizes the alternative version of masculinity that reified desire seems to allow. In one sense, Barkley’s death resolves, or rather evades, the tensions in the novel’s conception of masculinity, but in another way her death underscores the point the novel raises—the inadequacy of reified desire as a basis for masculinity. Certainly as Henry waits passively for Barkley’s fate to be determined, he experiences an emasculating reversal of gender roles; now she is undergoing a potentially fatal confrontation, similar to battle, and he, like women traditionally in wartime, must wait passively for the outcome. Barkley repeats Henry’s experience of being trapped in a warlike situation (“this was the price you paid for sleeping together. This was the end of the trap” [p. 320]); indeed, dying stoically, she defeats Henry in the competition for status that began with her acceptance of their relationship’s basis in desire. In dying bravely—she confronts the ultimate fear-inducing situation of death and masters it—in a feminine version of a battlefield, she achieves exactly the sort of heroic stature that persistently eludes Henry.27 Thus her death completes the novel’s earlier ironic relation to war, undermining its status as a masculine preserve by granting a comparable heroism to a woman. In so doing, the novel subverts Henry’s belief that his maleness as expressed by his sexuality is a secure form of male identity; Barkley both defeats him at his own male game of bravery and deprives him of the traditional masculine role of protector of a woman.

Yet, in the final chapter’s very undermining of war as a masculine preserve, masculinity as an ideal is retained. Barkley achieves her powerful subversion of Henry’s masculinity precisely by imitating masculinity, most dramatically in her capacity to accept and face down death; even her final remarks are stoic and laconic, in the best masculine mode: “I’m not afraid. I just hate it” (p. 330). While Barkley achieves the traditional mark of masculine bravery, calm in the face of fear, in this chapter Henry

27The novel’s relation to an earlier tradition of popular writing (discussed in Stearns and Haggerty), which associates masculinity with the ability to master fear, is important here, as it suggests how fully Barkley succeeds in fulfilling a masculine role.
fails to do so, underlining the limitations of his masculinity; but the ideal of masculine behavior is vindicated in its performance by Barkley.

So, paradoxically, Henry attains in the loss of Barkley a renewed model for masculinity. It is a model, moreover, that is useful for Hemingway’s efforts to aestheticize masculine experience and thus to provide in an aesthetic transformation of such experience a source of masculine identity. Barkley’s aphoristic dying lines speak for the men that Henry has seen dying in the war and her words express the sentiment that they might well have expressed—disillusionment. Significantly, her ability to say anything at all at the moment of her death distinguishes her from the men of the novel, who repeatedly have trouble articulating their feelings; they joke, misunderstand one another, and worry about their seditious comments being overheard, rather than successfully communicating. It is a sign of masculinity in the novel precisely to have trouble articulating one’s response to the traumatic events of war, in an exaggerated version of a characteristically reticent masculine mode. But in Barkley, Hemingway creates a character that can allow his hero to achieve a masculine transcendence vicariously and aesthetically. By sharing a reified desire with Henry, she comes to share (because of sexual reification’s implication in the redefinition of gender boundaries) a masculine province of risk-taking and of active sexual desire and, hence, a masculine relation to death. But as a woman, she is able to articulate this central experience that men, throughout the novel, cannot: “It’s just a dirty trick,” she comments, dying, in the most eloquent expression of the disillusionment that pervades the novel (p. 331). This mostly masculine mood is expressed through a female character; Barkley’s femininity is marginalized as she becomes the key mechanism for the successful articulation of a masculine experience. But this articulation is hardly a victory for a triumphant machismo. The expression of the impact of masculine experience—the embodiment of masculine ideals of bravery and emotional reticence—is possible in the novel only because, ironically, masculine ideals are embodied in the feminine Barkley. As a woman, she is able both to express emotion and to occasion it in a male, allowing an aestheticization of experience that occurs because Henry, as narrator as well as character, identifies with the heroism of Barkley and frames his narrative to make her utterance climactic: “It’s just a dirty trick.” But in aestheticizing masculine ideals, making them available to his narrator only vicariously, nostalgically, and through the narrative memory that the text supplies, Hemingway expresses his sense that masculinity in actuality—unaestheticized—remains fragile and vulnerable.

Barkley’s importance in the novel lies in allowing an aesthetic version of masculine identity, which stands as compensatory to the very fragility
of the masculine identity suggested through Henry’s relationship with her. The cultural work this aestheticization of masculinity must do is to transcend what is now seen as the arbitrarily restrictive and unemotional masculine self, while maintaining a masculine mode in the reticence and understatement of Hemingway’s style. Looking back on his early career Hemingway would define his task as to “cut . . . scrollwork and ornament out” of his prose; given the traditional association of femininity and ornament, the task is to make the prose more clearly virile. 28 But at the same time the novel’s elegiac mood, evident from its opening paragraphs, which becomes centered on the sense of pain and loss at Barkley’s death, allows this selfconsciously virile prose to bear an undercurrent of sentiment that contradicts conventional masculinity. Thus the novel’s stance at once reflects a new sense of masculinity’s arbitrary construction and resists masculinity’s subversion by transferring gender tensions to, and eliding them within, the opaque space of literary style. The desperate search for a resolution within literary style of the contradictions of masculine identity has its source in Hemingway’s ambivalence about reified desire as an emergent basis for a masculine identity. Even while the novel suggests sympathy for Henry’s sexual desire, and for Barkley’s as well, this liberation of reified desire is understood as implicated in larger processes of reification that powerfully undermine a stable male identity, redrawing forever the boundaries of gender. Reified desire, though celebrated and defended, finally offers no solution to the ills of masculinity.

28Ernest Hemingway, A Moveable Feast (New York, 1964), p. 12, quoted in Kennedy, p. 189. This ostentatious and virile restraint of the prose undergirds the famous passage in A Farewell to Arms about rejecting the abstract terms that glorify war in favor of “concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates” (p. 185).