

Masculinity of War and Citationality of Love in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*

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1. Hemingway's Masculinity and *A Farewell to Arms*

Ernest Hemingway's masculinity and misogyny in his third novel, *A Farewell to Arms*, has been criticized by many critics, which is understandable simply because of its plot. This novel consists half of a war story and half of a love story: The protagonist, Frederic Henry, an American lieutenant in the Italian Army in World War I, falls in love with Catherine Barkley, an English nurse. After fleeing from the battlefield, Frederic begins to live with Catherine, who soon becomes pregnant. At the end of the book, Catherine and the baby die, and Frederic walks out into the rain without explicating lamentation. Although it is not unreasonable to criticize the ostensible misogyny or masculinity of Frederic's attitude, feminist criticism of *Farewell* is, I will argue, still not sufficient and, moreover, has been unfair. It is true that feminist readings of *Farewell* have been sophisticated, but their criticism, in my opinion, is subsumed within Hemingway's self-conscious handling of his masculinity. The goal of this paper is, trying to revise feminist readings, to explicate the complicated problem of gender in *Farewell* and correct its unfair reputation.

As for Hemingway's/*Farewell's* masculinity, we have to distinguish at least two elements: that of form or poetics, and that of content or plot.

First, his so-called "iceberg theory"¹ has sometimes been criticized for its exclusive, therefore sometimes masculine, attitude. This theory is a kind of "modernist understatement," and Hemingway has been regarded as its spokesperson. In *A Moveable Feast*, for example, Hemingway writes: "Well, I thought, now I have them [the works employing the iceberg theory] so they [people] do not understand them. . . . And as long as they do not understand it you are ahead of them. . . . It would not be bad if they caught up a little" (69). This only-those-who-can-understand-can-understand type of attitude was more or less common among modernist writers. As Andreas Huyssen points out, modernists tried to gender "mass culture and the masses as feminine, while

high culture, whether traditional or modern, clearly remains the privileged realm of male activities" (47). Thus, high modernist's poetics, including the iceberg theory, is inseparable from masculinity.

Although it is true that Hemingway himself declares an exclusive and masculine attitude in his nonfictional essays, I will argue that he is not at all relying on this kind of attitude in his fictional works, at least in *Farewell*, but rather constructs them through problematizing the masculinity of his poetics. In order to reveal this self-consciousness, we have to distinguish carefully Frederic the character and Frederic the narrator, who is narrating the whole story long after Catherine's death.² I will discuss this point in section two, in which we will witness the self-deconstruction of not only Frederic the character's, but also Frederic the narrator's masculinity.

Second, as I have already mentioned above, the plot of *Farewell* can be regarded as masculine. Although I will deal with feminist critics at length later on, even in 1939, Edmund Wilson—who "was the first to suggest that Catherine is a victim of Hemingway's hostility toward women" (Spanier, "Hemingway's Unknown Soldier" 76)—wrote that "the hero of *A Farewell to Arms* eventually destroys Catherine—after enjoying her abject devotion—by giving her a baby, itself born dead" (254). Many critics followed this tack, including Leslie Fiedler who emphasized that Hemingway could not deal with women but felt "an obligation to introduce women . . . though he does not know what to do with them beyond taking them to bed" (305). As for *Farewell*, he argues, "Only dead woman becomes neither a bore nor a mother; and before Catherine can quite become either she must die, killed not by Hemingway, of course, but by childbirth" and "Had Catherine lived, she could only turned into a bitch; for this is the fate in Hemingway's imagination of all Anglo-Saxon women" (306).

This kind of evaluation is seriously underestimating the power that *Farewell* gives Catherine. A close reading of the couple's conversations will reveal that Catherine implicitly deconstructs Frederic's masculinity. Here, the opposition by speech act theory between the performative and the constative will be helpful: the application of this theory to their conversations will show not only that Catherine succeeds in performatively deconstructing Frederic's masculinity, but also that her deconstructive attitude toward their love is related to her own problem—unable to love a man while recovering from the shock of the death of her fiancé. I will deal with the relationship between Frederic and Catherine in section three, and Catherine's individual problem in section four.

2. Frederic's "Farewell" to "Arms" and the Return of the Repressed

Since at least half of *Farewell* is a war novel, we cannot avoid considering the relationship between war and masculinity if we are to deal with the problem of masculinity. Generally speaking, the battlefield is a highly masculine place where there are almost no women, and men's bravery is tested under the banner of "fight or flight."

Thus, taking into account Hemingway's/*Farewell's* notorious masculinity, the title of the novel appears a little strange because it literally means flight from a battlefield, something which Frederic commits indeed. Although it is true that Frederic must have been killed if he had not escaped, a fact still worth noticing is that Hemingway chose "A Farewell to Arms" as the title, which does not indicate bravery but rather cowardice.

The contradiction between the critical opinions on Hemingway's/*Farewell's* masculinity and the meaning of the title already suggests that the novel is not so simple in terms of gender issues. In order to examine the point more closely, I would like to focus attention on Frederic the narrator, whose narration tries to interpret retrospectively and sometimes justify what Frederic the character said and did in the past. A close reading of the narrator's commentaries will reveal that his justifications self-deconstruct in the end.

At around the middle of the book, Frederic the narrator makes a comment about the patriotic statements by an Italian soldier Gino:

I did not say anything. I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice . . . Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates. (165)

This passage is interesting in the present context because it is criticizing warfare in terms of poetics: the discourse at the battlefield tends to be "obscene" because it tries to justify warfare through "abstract" significations. In order to tell a war story without being "obscene," all the narrator can do is to continue describing only "concrete" facts.

However, we cannot help but notice that his declaration itself is performing the same "obscenity" that he criticizes here. Or, at least, it is clear that he does

not succeed in remaining within the realm of concrete description. As the narrator is telling the whole story from a retrospective point of view, this contradiction seems almost impossible to avoid structurally. E. M. Halliday, touching on this contradiction, points out that *Farewell* is a failure compared to *The Sun Also Rises*. According to him, *Farewell* includes “a higher proportion of subjective passages” and “their occurrence slackens somewhat the objective tautness.” In addition, those “subjective passages” are “thematic intrusions” because we feel that the narrator “thought them retrospectively, and is delivering short lectures” (210-11).

Although Halliday is right to point out that Frederic often gives “lectures,” it would be more productive to give closer consideration to those “lectures” themselves instead of neglecting them as a cause of the failure of the novel. It is true that the fact that the narrator often gives “lectures” seems to be one of the chief reasons why *Farewell* sold very well, because the readers can get those “lectures” as a concise interpretation of the novel.³ However, there is no reason that we have to accept his “lectures” at face value. To examine the way in which Frederic’s lectures betray themselves would help us to understand Hemingway’s intention of choosing the title.

Right after his dive into the Tagliament river, that is, after his “farewell to arms,” this lecture appears: “I was through. . . . There were the good ones, and the brave ones, and calm ones, and the sensible ones, and they deserved it. But it was not my show any more . . . ” (206). Here, he is repeating his attack on and breaking away from the abstract discourse of warfare. To be more specific, he seems to be bidding a farewell to the obscenity of categorizing people by labeling them with a single adjective, which would be a kind of abstraction.

Frederic’s lecture on abstraction and obscenity that I have already quoted resonates with another lecture on courageousness, which the narrator suddenly gives while he is talking about Catherine:

If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry. (222)

Although this lecture appears long before Catherine’s death, the narrator, who

is of course narrating after Catherine's death, is employing the terms which are used by Catherine at her dying hour ("I'm not brave any more, darling. I'm all broken. They've broken me. I know it now" [285]). Therefore, here he is implicitly talking about Catherine's death (see, for example, Nagel 168-69).

In this way, the narrator here is explaining the reason for Catherine's death using abstract adjectives which are supposed to have been abandoned when he bid farewell to the war. Furthermore, and much more crucially, when he explains, "Catherine was killed earlier than others because she was braver than others," he is unconsciously employing not only the vocabularies but also the *logic* of warfare.

We can read this unconscious remark as the return of the repressed: he tried to repress war, but it returns into the love story unconsciously through the narrator's lectures. Furthermore, what he represses and is unconsciously obsessed with is not so much war itself but the flight from the battlefield, that is, his cowardice. First, he tries to conceal the cowardice of his flight by justifying it in terms of poetics. However, his narration performatively (and unconsciously) reveals its own inconsistency by employing abstract words, especially "brave" and "courage."

Dealing with the same point, Scott Donaldson examines thoroughly how Frederic feels guilty about his selfish abandoning of the war and, consequently, his repression of war information fails in the end: "Hemingway conveys the persistence of this debilitating emotion in two ways: through Lieutenant Henry's unsuccessful attempts to rationalize his desertion, and through his equally unsuccessful attempts to shut the war out of his consciousness" (104).

When we take into account the relationship between Catherine and Frederic, we can revise this opinion: Frederic feels guilty because he survived Catherine. For him, it seems that he could survive because of his cowardice, which is the reason why he obsessively tries to explain Catherine's early death using the words "courage" and "brave." Therefore, the title of the novel implies an irony: it literally indicates that Frederic could not attain masculinity and that his "farewell to arms" itself also failed in terms of poetics.

3. "I love you"—Catherine and Citationality

Next, let us consider the same problem in terms of the relationship between Frederic and Catherine. First of all, in order to deal with their relationship, it is necessary to take a general view of feminist criticism of *Farewell*. Subsequently,

I will try to go beyond the former feminist critics by reading conversations between the couple closely, applying the opposition between performative and constative, and the deconstruction of the two by Jacques Derrida. Finally, I would like to show that Catherine deconstructs Frederic's masculinity not out of malice but because of her own problem (which will be discussed in detail in the next section).

Apart from the early critics I mentioned in the first section, it is Judith Fetterley's 1976 essay that ushered in a full-scale feminist attack on *Farewell*. In this notoriously offensive essay, she emphasizes Frederic's "hostility" toward women and concludes that Catherine's and her child's death is "the logical consequence of the cumulative hostilities Frederic feels toward her" (62).

After Fetterley, Catherine's "pretention" to be in love with Frederic and her giving him an "education" have been keywords as feminist readings have been revised and sophisticated. For example, Joyce Wexler argues that at the beginning of their relationship Frederic approaches Catherine only to fulfill his sexual desire, while she "devises a kind of therapy for herself by pretending to love Frederic in place of her fiancé" (114). Or, Sandra Spanier notes in her very informative essay that "a few critics *have* seen Catherine's strength and recognized her crucial role in the education of Frederic Henry" ("*Hemingway's Unknown Soldier*" 79).

Although these opinions are not untrue, they seem somewhat unfair to both Frederic and Catherine—that is, to the novel itself—perhaps because they want to save Catherine too much from Frederic's/Hemingway's misogyny. However, it is unnatural that we have to regard a female character as attractive because she drags a male protagonist into a false love by pretending to love him. To correct these preconceived opinions, I would like to interpret Catherine's "pretention" and "education" from another point of view.

Shortly after Frederic's "lecture" on courageousness that I have already quoted, the characters engage in the following conversation:

"They won't get us," I said. "Because you're too brave. Nothing ever happens to the brave."

"They die of course."

"But only once."

"I don't know. Who said that?"

"The coward dies a thousand deaths, the brave but one?"

"Of course. Who said it?"

“I don’t know.”

“He was probably a coward,” she said. “He knew a great deal about cowards but nothing about the brave. The brave dies perhaps two thousand deaths if he’s intelligent. He simply doesn’t mention them.”

“I don’t know. It’s hard to see inside the head of the brave.”

“Yes. That’s how they keep that way.”

“You’re an authority.”

“You’re right, darling. That was deserved.”

“You’re brave.”

“No,” she said. “But I would like to be.” (125-26)

This conversation is crucial for several reasons. First, this is a debate about the relationship between bravery/cowardice and death (and Catherine, “an authority” on bravery, wins). Therefore, Catherine’s refusal to be called “brave” can have a performatively ironical effect on Frederic’s (failed) masculinity. Second, it is very interesting that she confutes his opinion saying “He simply doesn’t mention them,” because this statement precisely corresponds with Hemingway’s iceberg theory itself. So, Hemingway is having Catherine deconstruct Frederic’s masculinity, endowing Catherine with a better understanding of poetics. This performative deconstruction is Catherine’s “education.”

Moreover, to understand Frederic’s seemingly casual response, “It’s hard to see inside the head of the brave,” I would like to point to an earlier conversation:

She looked at me, “And do you love me?”

“Yes.”

“You did say you loved me, didn’t you?”

“Yes,” I lied. “I love you.” I had not said it before.

“And you call me Catherine?”

“Catherine.” . . .

“Say, I’ve come back to Catherine in the night.”

“I’ve come back to Catherine in the night.”

“Oh, darling, you have come back, haven’t you?” . . .

. . . I knew I did not love Catherine Barkley nor had any idea of loving her. This was a *game*, like bridge, in which you said things instead of playing cards. . . .

She looked down at the grass. "This is a rotten *game* we play, isn't it?"

"What game?"

"Don't be dull."

"I'm not, on purpose."

"You're a nice boy," she said. "And you play it as well as you know how. But it's a rotten game."

"Do you always know what people think?"

"Not always. But I do with you. You don't have to pretend you love me. That's over for the evening. Is there anything you'd like to talk about?"

"But I do love you."

"Please let's not lie when you don't have to. I had a very fine little show and I'm all right now. You see I'm not mad and I'm not gone off. It's only a little sometimes."

I pressed her hand, "Dear Catherine."

"It sounds very funny now—Catherine. You don't pronounce it very much alike. But you're very nice. You're a very good boy." (28-30, italics mine)

Here, "game" is the keyword. As I italicized, the word appears first in Frederic's inner description, and then Catherine immediately mentions the same word, which makes Frederic surprised, compelling him to say, "What game?" Subsequently, he asks, perhaps cynically, "Do you always know what people think," to which Catherine responds "I do with you." This exchange—resonating with "It's hard to see inside the head of the brave"—would put Frederic on the side of the coward. Thus, regardless of whether Catherine herself is fully conscious of their ironical effect or not, her statements are given a power to deconstruct Frederic's discourse.

Now I would like to move on to the problem of the love between them. Firstly, although their relationship begins by being compared to a "game," we must not overlook the fact that their notions of "game" are different from each other. Frederic's "game" is very simple: how to win a woman over. For instance, when he is slapped on the cheek by her because he forcibly tries to kiss her, he feels, hearing her apology, "I had a certain advantage." The narrator adds: "I was angry and yet certain, seeing it all ahead like the movements in a chess game" (24).

However, as we have already seen, it is Catherine who mentions explicitly that their love is only a game. Furthermore, her notion of "game" seems to be

more complicated than his. In order to understand her complexity, I would like to examine the strange deed of hers, that is, how she forces Frederic to repeat her words, which will illuminate the crucial disparity between their “games.”

Here I would like to introduce the opposition of the performative and the constative, which is an elementary idea in speech act theory, and became popular partly because Jacques Derrida deconstructed the opposition. According to J. L. Austin, “constative utterances,” or simply “constatives,” can be distinguished as either true or false. In other words, constatives are factual or literal statements. On the other hand, “performatives” are the statements which do something by saying them. For example, “I’ll marry you” would be categorized as performatives.

Applying this opposition to the conversation above, we will be able to see that Frederic’s statements are always constatives. That is to say, in his mind, Catherine is constatively refuting his false statement that he loves her. So it is important to note that he—not only Frederic the character but Frederic the narrator as well—is trying to explain the situation constatively by additionally remarking, “I lied.” However, he is missing Catherine’s point. Why should the judgment between true or false about this most worn-out cliché, “I love you,” be of any consequence? Expressions related to love should be primarily performative⁴ and it would be patently absurd to judge their constative validities. “I love you” can only make sense when it operates performatively.

It is well known that Derrida deconstructs the opposition between the performative and the constative. However, strictly speaking, he does not reject these concepts of constative and performative (it is clear from the fact that he continues to use them in his later works). The point of his attack on speech act theory is that Austin unjustly excludes the “citationality” or “iterability” of performatives when he demarcates the realm of performatives. Austin regards all the “cited” or “iterated” utterances as “non-serious” and limits his argument to “serious,” therefore successful, performatives. However, according to Derrida, the success of performatives depends on its citationality or iterability, namely, the possibility of its failure, because a performative statement cannot have any meaning “if its formulation did not repeat a ‘coded’ or iterable statement, in other words if the expressions I use to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as *conforming* to an iterable model” (Derrida 326). Thus, Derrida’s point is not to *do away with* the opposition between the performative and the constative, but to *correct* the concept of the performative, which should always be exposed to “the value of risk or being open to failure”

(324).

Now, we can understand the meaning of Catherine's making Frederic repeat her statements. By doing so, she is justly re-introducing the citationality/iterability into performatives by making him repeat her name, the cliché "I love you," etc.

However, her intention is different from, or even opposite to, therefore goes beyond, Derrida's. This is the point: while Derrida recalls uncertainty to think about the only way to utter a successful performative, Catherine does so in order to regard all performatives always as cited, or, for her, failed. Then, the possibility that their "I love you" will be taken "seriously" is excluded in their relationship. In other words, what she introduces is not the possibility of failure but the inevitability of it. Her "game" and "pretention" mean to "love" under this condition. Her statement "It sounds very funny now—Catherine. You don't pronounce it very much alike" can be understood in such a context: Frederic's "Catherine" has degenerated into a cited/failed "'Catherine.'"

4. Catherine's Dilemma or Love's Aporia

For feminist critics, this deed of hers is not "strange" because they explain it as her strategic "pretention" of which foolish Frederic is unaware. However, in my reading, if she is "pretending," her "pretention" is too much, because she seems to go on to deconstruct their relationship itself. This is why I called this act of hers "strange." Then, lastly, we must call into question the "strangeness" of her "pretention." Consequently, we are to understand that her strangeness is rooted in Catherine's individual dilemma and self-defense, which makes her confront the aporia of love.

Let us start with a simple example. The reason Catherine keeps a certain distance from love with Frederic is of course that he only commits himself to love as a mere "game" (in his own sense of the word). She knows this detachment of his. However, she is obviously attracted to him, so she tries to keep the same distance lest she should be hurt in the end. She is controlling herself consciously not to fall in love.

Nevertheless, even after Frederic seems to commit himself to love, Catherine cannot fall in love with him. He had fallen in love no later than in Chapter 14, after they made love in the hospital.⁵ Not much later comes the following conversation:

“There, darling. Now you’re all clean inside and out. Tell me. How many people have you ever loved?”

“Nobody.”

“Not me even?”

“Yes, you.”

“How many others really?”

“None.”

“How many have you—how do you say it?—stayed with?”

“None.”

“You’re lying to me.”

“Yes.”

“It’s all right. Keep right on lying to me. That’s what I want you to do. Were they pretty?” . . .

“I don’t know anything about it.”

“You’re just mine. That’s true and you’ve never belonged to any one else. . . . How much it costs?”

“I don’t know.”

“Of course not. Does she say she loves him? Tell me that. I want to know that.”

“Yes. If he wants her to.”

“Does he say he loves her? Tell me please. It’s important.”

“He does if he wants to.” (95)

It would not be enough to read from this conversation Catherine’s possessiveness. I would rather say just the opposite: she is trying to eliminate the possibility of their love’s uniqueness in advance. She tells him that she does not care if his response to her question is a lie. That is to say, she is declaring again her attitude to receive all his statements as being “cited,” or, as James Phelan puts it, “Catherine puts herself in a position where her response to Frederic’s words must also be at some remove from her feelings” (58). In this light, we can understand the reason Catherine dares to ask what they talk about in a brothel. A brothel is a place where all statements are regarded as “non-serious,” and Catherine makes their own “I love you” virtually indistinguishable from such non-serious statements. They are on the stage of Catherine’s “game” in this sense.

Then, why does she have to nullify their love’s uniqueness instead of Frederic’s love? Logically speaking, the problem must be on her side. Searching

for the cause for this strange deed of her within the text, we might remember the fact that she had lost her fiancé before she met Frederic. When she appears for the first time in the novel, she is holding a cane—a memento of her dead lover—and even Frederic knows that she dare not love anyone else because she would think it a betrayal: “Maybe she would pretend that I was her boy that was killed” (36).

Namely, it is her love itself that is iterated.⁶ She feels guilt, both toward her dead fiancé and toward Frederic: this is her dilemma. This is the reason why she avoids making their love serious. To put it in other words, her “strangeness” can be understood as her romantic irony.

Therefore, what she has to do here is to bear and accept the iterability and citationality of her own love. In fact, the difficulty of the task is rooted in the structural aporia of love: love can only be expressed by clichés, such as “I love you,” which could have a meaningful effect when they work performatively, which depends on the iterability or citationality of them. So, love depends on its iterability/citationality. However, for lovers, there is no meaning in love unless it is unique, that is, unrepeatable.

Thus, through her individual dilemma, she seems to be encountering this aporia of love. Precisely because this is an aporia, her drama is not to overcome it but to continue confronting it. When she is dying, the dilemma/aporia seems to be surfacing:

. . . “You won’t do our things with another girl, or say the same things, will you?”
“Never.”
“I want you to have girls, though.”
“I don’t want them.” (292)

Here, she is being torn between conflicting emotions: she at first tries to exclude iterability, then reconsiders her request and recalls it. Here, very paradoxically, by opening their love to iterability, she is retrospectively confirming the possibility of their love’s success. I believe we can call this resolution of hers “brave.”

Coda

We all know about Hemingway’s indisputable reputation as a master of the

short story. For one, Harold Bloom asserts, “[Hemingway’s] true genius was for very short stories, and hardly at all for extended narrative” (Introduction 3). To this I would respond yes and no: “Yes” because it is true that what matters is length; “No” because we have to grasp the operation of Hemingway’s technique when we are to understand his “extended narrative.” Unlikely in his short stories, his poetics is at work in multiple instances in his novels. In order to grasp the complicated and self-conscious mechanism of his poetics, we have to be careful not to be misled by his public image. A close reading of his “extended narrative” could reveal, as we have already seen, that Hemingway himself was indeed writing against “Papa” Hemingway.

Notes

¹ In an interview, for example, Hemingway said, “There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that show. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. . . . If a writer omits something because he does not know it then there is a hole in the story” (“Ernest”).

² See Edmonds, who argues that Frederic is narrating the story ten years after Catherine’s death. As for the difference between Frederic the narrator and Frederic the character, see also Davidson, Nagel, and Phelan.

³ As for the sales of *Farewell*, see Trogdon (Chapter 3).

⁴ As for this point, it would also be suggestive that Austin argued that, for performatives, the meaningful opposition is not drawn between true and false but happy and unhappy (1-14).

⁵ In this chapter, the narrator says, “God knows I had not wanted to fall in love with her. I had not wanted to fall in love with any one” (85). We do not have enough reason to judge the statement a lie.

⁶ Spanier argues that Catherine becomes sober on page 28-30 in the novel because the words she makes Frederic repeat are the ones that she wished to hear from her dead fiancé (“Catherine” 135).

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