On the last bittersweet pages of Ernest Hemingway’s posthumous memoir, *A Moveable Feast* (1964), he laments the disintegration of his relationship with Hadley Richardson, his first wife, using a striking simile: “When you have two people who love each other, are happy and gay and really good work is being done by one or both of them, people are drawn to them as surely as migrating birds are drawn at night to a powerful beacon” (208). This simile locates love as a palpable thing existing between and within specific people, while also noting the distinctly measurable effect on those near this love. Of course, there is some danger in taking this simile as more than the regretful musings of a middle-aged man—especially since the preface of the non-restored edition warns the reader that *A Moveable Feast* “may be regarded as fiction.” Nonetheless, this poetic figure and its implications about love’s concrete capacity to attract and illuminate life provide a useful lens for reading Hemingway’s sophomore novel, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929).

For years now, and particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, critical debate has raged over what sort of love story *A Farewell to Arms* really is: romantic, nihilistic, pastoral, or tragic? For instance, John Beversluis’s “Dispelling the Romantic Myth,” in which he claims to “offer a radically different reading” from previous scholarship, argues that *Farewell* is actually a leave-taking of the “love trap” (18, 24). Protagonist Frederic Henry’s peripatetic journey through the novel—through the muddy battle lines of World War I, a whirlwind romance with VAD nurse Catherine Barkley, a dangerous desertion to Switzerland, and the unexpected grief of Barkley’s death during childbirth—leaves him disillusioned, convinced that “love is not enough to replace a discarded world” (21). Similarly, Bernard Oldsey notes the narrator’s tone is that of a “disappointed, or ‘ruined,’ romantic,” as the narrative details the “immemorial struggle between man’s idealization of the world and his reluctant acceptance of brute fact” (178). In sharp contrast, however, Robert Merrill reminds his readers that Hemingway “once referred to the novel as his *Romeo and Juliet,*” and his claim that “we most desire … and most respect” Henry for “committing himself in
love to Catherine Barkley” neatly encapsulates the romantic side of this long-standing critical debate (571-72).

Significantly, twenty-first-century criticism continues to weigh in on the place and role of love in *A Farewell to Arms*, though scholars have tried to abandon such across-the-board questions by focusing on the finer points of the novel. Randall S. Wilhelm, in his “Objects on the Table: Anxiety and Still Life in Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*,” compares Hemingway’s list-like descriptions to still-life paintings. Wilhelm observes that still-life paintings, which endeavor to distance and objectify what is undeniably an animate experience, became a symbol of anxiety for many modernists. From this perspective, Henry’s effort to retell his life with Barkley in a series of “still-life” scenes is a badly concealed attempt to suppress his lack of love for her and “his guilt regarding the tragic outcome of a wartime romance that had been a game all along” (64-65, 76). As another example, Trevor Dodman’s “*A Farewell to Arms* as Trauma Narrative” focuses on Henry’s struggle to narrativize himself after the dual traumas of a trench mortar and his lover’s death, and Dodman concludes that though Henry and Barkley do enjoy themselves, “Their time together is marked by shame, tension, and uncertainty” rather than the security and love Henry craves during his fantasies (262). Clearly, the question of love—whether it exists, what it looks like, and what it does—is one that critics cannot easily sidestep when approaching the novel.

This essay contends that love is the centering principle of Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*; indeed, the narrative posits a world in which love illuminates all of life, attracting the characters with its beacon-like power to make meaningful in the people, experiences, and possible futures surrounding them. Though a cultural mystique surrounds the concept of “love,” it is not an abstraction like glory or honor, and the Italian army priest can distinctly define it for Henry: “When you love you wish to do things for. You wish to sacrifice for. You wish to serve” (72; Merrill 577). As a willful desire “to do things for” that develops into self-sacrificial action, love can be given and received, and it exists in the relationships people have with each other, themselves, and their world.

Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory is one well-known approach to theorizing distributive social forces such as love. As Latour argues in his 1999 essay “Factures/Fractures,” humans are always enmeshed in dense networks of attachments to other people, things, and ideas; we may continually exchange our attachments, but we cannot escape the state of being attached. He eventually
concludes: “If it is no longer a question of opposing attachment and detachment, but instead of good and poor attachments, then there is only one way of deciding the quality of these ties: to inquire of what they consist, what they do, how one is affected by them” (22). Using Latour’s terminology, we can understand *A Farewell to Arms* as a concerted study of human attachment. Henry evaluates “good and poor attachments” based solely on the amount and quality of the love (i.e., sacrifice and selflessness) harbored in and between people. By narrativizing a series of loving and unloving relationships and social situations, Henry explores the tangible and measurable marks of love, which he posits as a magnetically attractive presence that—like a beacon of light—allows characters to “see” meaning in their experiences and “look forward” to a viable future.

Claims about the romantic nature of Henry’s experiences must, of course, address fresh scholarship such as Dodman’s, which contends that *A Farewell to Arms* is “always already” the prosthetic reconstruction of a traumatized soldier seeking to make his past life coherent (250-51). While Hemingway also always lingers as the ventriloquizing author behind Henry’s narration, the present study remains as suspicious as Dodman of the “truth” of Henry’s narrative. Certainly, Hemingway’s iceberg theory leaves open the temptation to psychoanalyze Henry and sound out the accuracy of his account. However, as readers cannot cobble together what “actually” happened, this essay treats *Farewell* as is, with the understanding that the text is one retrospective narrative that reflects the hopes, values, and conclusions of a young man who survives the horrors of the Great War and seeks to make sense of them.

Although scholars such as Beversluis have questioned the existence of Henry’s and Barkley’s love, given that Henry shares so little of his “inner life” with her (23), recent criticism allows readers to recognize the powerful silencing effect wartime traumas—including shell shock and bereavement—have on both of Hemingway’s star-crossed lovers. Barkley and Henry are best read through a complex matrix that not only includes their words but also their actions, second-guesses, self-alienations, and pointed silences. Beginning with the inexorable presence of the Great War, then, this essay establishes that *A Farewell to Arms* depicts war and its corollary narratives as repellent discourses that fundamentally lack love, thereby creating an absence that causes a sense of meaninglessness for the characters. In contrast, the development of Barkley and Henry’s relationship from casual lovers to de facto wife and husband confirms the strength of their love and that love’s power to illuminate their expe-
rience with a sense of belonging, moral purity, and pastoral pleasure. Finally, Barkley’s death locates the loss (or lack) of love as the great evil of Farewell’s narrative: whether love is lost through direct maternal death or trench warfare, a lack of love literally de-means life. In light of this reading, future critics may find it productive to re-evaluate, head on, the question of love in A Farewell to Arms and interrogate whether this starry-eyed novel is a fluke in the Hemingway Text or sets an essential precedent.

The Wars That Robb’d Our Store: War’s Lack of Love

A Farewell to Arms declares itself a tragic war novel on its very first page when the pastoral descriptions of the mountains and river are supplanted by “troops marching under the window and guns going past pulled by motor tractors” (3). Yet Hemingway tellingly fastens the war narrative to the love story by deploying another one of his striking similes. The troops passing Henry’s house carry “heavy” cartridge-boxes on their belts that “bulge” under their capes, so the men look “as though they were six months gone with child” (4). As Jennifer A. Haytock notes, this image presages the completion of Farewell’s love story, which ends with Barkley’s lethal birthing of a stillborn child—a mirror image for “[t]he soldiers [who] will give birth not to a living being but to violence and death” (70). Despite the rich crops and fruit trees, then, Robert Merrill recognizes that the reader has entered a “bad world,” where cholera kills “only” seven thousand, and the firm link between the bleak wartime beginning and Henry and Barkley’s intimate ending suggests that the world’s “badness” has something to do with love—or more precisely, lack of love (573).

Carlos Baker proposes war itself as the “social manifestation” of the world’s “fatigue and suffering, loneliness, defeat and doom” (99)—in other words, its “badness”—and A Farewell to Arms’s narrator, Frederic Henry, confirms this. In the often-quoted “glory” passage, Henry locates war’s evil in its hypocritical vagueness, which disrupts emotional and political attachments and thus justifies individual and national acts of violence. In equating war with manifest doom, Henry consciously contradicts what Kimberley Reynolds calls the “potent mythos” of World War I, which was a pervasive cultural narrative promoting the war as “an opportunity to display widely admired characteristics such as patriotism, duty, courage, and willingness to put others before oneself” (256). Thus, after a conversation with the Italian patriot Gino, who embraces the summer’s losses as a meaningful act of selfless sacrifice, Henry reminds himself:
I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. (184-85)

While Aimee Pozorski usefully points out Henry’s bitter disillusionment with language—which he finds temporary and disposable, and therefore inadequate to make sense of his war experience (82)—Margot Norris more clearly identifies why the pliability of war narratives so disgusts Henry. For him, war presents “a rhetorical problem—as a site of contradictions and disjunctions between its language and its unadorned material ‘reality’ as violence” (693).1 The true crime of war is the butchery-adorned-as-justice, a butchery only made palatable by deliberately eclipsing the human attachments existing between enemy combatants, governments, and national territories. In *A Farewell to Arms*, where love is sacrifice and selflessness (72; Beversluis 19), war epitomizes the lack of love, as it is an act of national and individual self-advancement or self-conservation through the killing of others.2 Unlike the metaphorical beam of light Hemingway imagined at the end of *A Moveable Feast*, which illuminates life and allows characters to perceive meaning, war as lack of love brings a sense of meaninglessness. War is like the meat-markets of Chicago, except the “meat” of war is simply buried: the soldiers’ deaths serve no purpose and have no (re-)generative value.

The demeaning of life that accompanies lack of love seeps into all the narrative spaces surrounding Henry’s war experience, especially his direct combat situations. During the Caporetto retreat, for example, Henry’s subordinate Aymo is shot and killed, possibly by their own allies; Henry contemplates afterward, “the killing came suddenly and unreasonably” (218; Merrill 574; my emphasis). Ironically, where Henry and his fellows later expect danger from nearby German battalions, they retreat through enemy lines without incident, prompting Henry to call Bonello’s decision to surrender purposeless and “so silly” (218). Even Henry’s shooting of the Italian sergeant carries a disturbing meaninglessness for the characters involved. Norris heatedly argues that Hemingway chose “every element of the incident” to “make Frederic’s shoot-
ing of the sergeant indefensible,” but she also cannot help but note the scene’s “utterly impersonal, objective narrative that betrays no emotion” (702-03). While the scene may certainly mean something to the reader who forms an empathetic attachment with the fictional sergeant, the shooting actually means nothing to Henry and the other ambulance drivers who are experiencing the war firsthand. Submerged in rhetoric and discourses that pointedly occlude human attachments, they neither desire the sergeant’s well-being nor act on such a loving impulse. Immediately after Bonello finishes off the “son of a bitch,” Henry returns to what really concerns him—salvaging a stuck car.

A few pages later, they are joking easily that Bonello always wanted to kill a sergeant and would later boast about it to a priest in confession, “Bless me, father, I killed a sergeant” (204, 207-08). All of Henry’s experiences in the war simply confirm what Passini tells him at the beginning, right before his mortar injury, that war’s essential lack of love causes the breakdown of sensible meaning: “There is nothing as bad as war. … When people realize how bad it is they cannot do anything to stop it because they go crazy” (50).

The corollary war narratives surrounding the grueling combat situations—such as the wartime brothels and the mess hall—also lack love and therefore obscure the characters’ sense of meaning. This becomes most evident through Henry’s roommate, the Italian surgeon Rinaldi, who only appears when Henry is at his unit’s headquarters and acts as a touchstone for Henry’s experience of the Italian Army. Significantly, Rinaldi is a prototypical cynic as defined by S.S. Sangwan and Satyapal Dahiya: he seeks his “own biological needs and pleasures” while “repudiat[ing] devotion,” therefore cutting himself off from selflessness and sacrifice (57). High-spirited and sanguine, Rinaldi first enters the pages of *A Farewell to Arms* to cross-examine Henry about the prostitutes he met in Milan and Rome while on leave. Rinaldi is also quick to comment on the new “English girls” in their town, claiming wildly that he will “probably marry” Catherine Barkley (11-12). He calls the local brothel, the Villa Rossa, “very edifying” and likes to get drunk, and when Henry invites Rinaldi to come with him to the Red Cross post, Rinaldi counters that he “like[s] the simpler pleasures” (32, 40-41). It would, of course, be presumptuous to label mess hall drinking games and casual sexual encounters as meaningless merely because they are “simple,” but when Rinaldi’s participation in the conventional soldier’s narratives of the brothel and the mess hall comes into sharp contrast with Henry’s growing understanding of love’s illuminating force—as it does in Book III of *Farewell*—the experiential emptiness of Rinaldi’s life becomes hard to ignore.
Henry and Rinaldi reunite happily after Henry’s long recovery in a Milan hospital, and despite Henry’s protests that he’s had jaundice and “can’t get drunk,” they immediately start on a bottle of Austrian cognac (168). Inevitably, Rinaldi brings up their old visits to the Villa Rossa, then teases Henry about Barkley when he learns that they have fallen in love (169). Unlike their previous benders, though, Rinaldi’s ribaldry now frays at the edges, appearing as a frail cloak for a deep insecurity about the meaning of his life. “Even with remorse you will have a better time [than me],” he admits to Henry: “Already I am only happy when I am working.” He looked at the floor again. … ‘I only like two other things; one is bad for my work and the other is over in half an hour or fifteen minutes. Sometimes less” (170). The glance at the floor hints at a discomfort with his life—which has boiled down to working, drinking, and sex—and his pronouncement of drinking as “bad” and his hesitant reduction of sex from half an hour to fifteen minutes to “sometimes less” only serve to demean his lived experience further. He has not even secured the “better time” he desired. As Merrill puts it, “Rinaldi’s depression” is all the “more fearful … for his cynicism had seemed an impregnable defense” (575). Threatened by an encroaching meaninglessness, Rinaldi attempts to recapture his previous gaiety: he jibes the priest in the mess hall as the “good old priest-baiters” used to do and declares himself the “snake of reason.” But an unrelentingly loveless life (with the help of a little cognac) has impaired his ability to make or see meaning: “It’s a lie,” he says to the priest, “you’re eating the body of our Lord. It’s God-meat. I know. That’s what you’re eating. … Don’t mind me. … I’m just a little crazy” (174). Tellingly, the major apologizes to Henry for Rinaldi’s incoherence (“He’s been under a strain”), and after Rinaldi has betrayed his paranoia that he may have syphilis, the priest makes a similar excuse for him (“I don’t believe it. … He’s very tired and overworked”). Later still, after Henry has survived the retreat from Caporetto, he too opines that he “did not think [Rinaldi] had syphilis” (233), reinforcing the likelihood that Rinaldi, the doctor, cannot even make meaning of his own body anymore. Separated from Henry, who appears to be the only character with whom Rinaldi has a truly affectionate attachment, he lacks the love needed to illuminate his life with a sense of meaning.

Although Henry and Barkley eventually come to forge a loving human attachment, their early interactions also play out according to the conventional and studiously disinterested brothel narrative, or as Barkley puts it herself “the nurse’s-evening-off” narrative (26). They begin kissing on their second meet-
ing and role-play as “darling” lovers on their third, yet Henry makes no bones about the fact that he “did not love Catherine Barkley nor had any idea of loving her” (26). Even though he thinks she is “probably a little crazy,” he pursues their love affair because “this was better than going every evening to the house for officers where the girls climbed all over you” (30). As Wilhelm observes, Henry does not empathize with Barkley as a human being, whose fiancé was blown “all to bits” and is currently suffering a major depressive episode; instead he approaches their love affair as “nothing more than playing with an object, ‘like moves in a chess game’” (68). This love-game simile, when developed further, becomes as revelatory as Hemingway’s other poetic figures: “This was a game, like bridge, in which you said things instead of playing cards. Like bridge, you had to pretend you were playing for money or playing for some stakes” (30-31; my emphasis). By reducing seduction to a game of cards, controlled by arbitrary rules and lacking any sort of stakes with concrete or payable value, Henry actively participates in the demeaning of their relationship that necessarily accompanies his lack of love. Not until after Henry’s injury and his relocation to Milan do he and Barkley discover love, which illuminates both their own domestic drama and war-torn Europe with a tangible sense of meaning.

Youth Waneth by Increasing: The Maturation of Love and the Inside-Out Pastoral

It is when Henry is temporarily recovering in a field hospital that the army priest visits him and explains the meaning of love. At this point, the priest can easily “size [Henry] up as a man who knows nothing about love or commitment” (Beversluis 19), but that fact changes quickly once Henry reaches the hospital in Milan. In fact, as soon as Barkley arrives and says “Hello, darling” in what appears to be a seamless continuation of their earlier role-playing, Henry admits, “When I saw her I was in love with her” (91). After Henry passes Barkley’s shibboleth (“You do love me?” “I really love you. I’m crazy about you”), and they have sex, he repeats his realization more fully: “God knows I had not wanted to fall in love with her. I had not wanted to fall in love with anyone. But God knows I had” (92-93). Merrill has also highlighted this passage, brandishing it to chide more cynical critics for “underestimat[ing]” Henry’s rapid attachment (577).

Of course, implicitly trusting Henry’s post-coital revelation of love may prove naïve, especially in light of Dodman’s reading that *A Farewell to Arms* is
“always already [in] the voice of a traumatized survivor” who discloses a “desire for a whole and perfect retelling of the past” (250-51). In other words, the Henry who is retrospectively “writing” Farewell would want to believe that he had truly loved Barkley. Dodman’s skepticism is commendable, but not simply because of Henry’s shell shock, which carries alienating, silencing, and debilitating aftereffects (249, 251); rather, according to the internal logic of the novel, Henry does not love Barkley since he has not served or sacrificed for her yet. Setting aside speculation over whether Barkley has enjoyed or “gotten something” from their relationship, she has been the primary giver thus far, from little things such as the St. Anthony medal to more valuable commodities such as her reputation at the Milan hospital. Perhaps most notable is her flight to Henry in Milan, in the face of no small distance and (presumably) a deal of red tape. Although Henry’s love for Barkley has not manifested yet—despite his repeated avowals (106, 108, 112)—the attachment between the characters is palpable, and Barkley’s love already exists between them, exerting its attractive pull on Henry from the very beginning of his recovery.

Charting the maturation of Henry’s love for Barkley requires the reader to jump forward to Books III and IV of A Farewell to Arms, but given thoroughgoing scholarly skepticism against Henry’s love, the work is urgent enough to be addressed immediately. Certainly by the time that Henry and Barkley row across Lake Maggiore to flee from the Italian authorities, Henry’s narrative overtly insists on his sacrifices for Barkley. During their night escape, Henry does most of the rowing, and when Barkley comments on his “poor hands” the next morning, Henry compares his torn-up wounds to the stigmata of Christ’s sacrificial crucifixion (284-85). Similarly, the chapters leading up to their flight from Stresa repeatedly emphasize the dangers Henry faces in leaving the Caporetto retreat to reunite with Barkley. As a deserter, he cannot move safely with the Italian army and has to smuggle himself aboard a train to reach Milan; even his clothes pose a danger to him, and he must discard the signs of his rank and borrow civilian clothes like “a masquerader” (243). On a thematic level, too, Henry’s multi-day trek across Italy to seek out Barkley reciprocates her journey from Gorizia to Milan to care for him in the hospital.

In reading Henry’s desertion as a loving sacrifice for Barkley, one must, of course, contend with critics such as Norris, who have long seen Henry’s desertion as a sign of his “cowardice” and “bad faith”—indeed, as a sign of selfishness (691). That Henry’s actions implicate Barkley in possible repercussions from the Italian government appears only to secure Norris’s argument.
However, Latour’s conception of human networks, in which some attachments are “good” and some are “poor,” helps readers see that the quality (or dysfunction) of one attachment need not reflect on a separate attachment. Thus, Henry’s decision to end his sacrifices for the war effort in Italy (“I was through. I wished them all the luck”) and instead invest in his attachment to Barkley does not necessitate that he will also desert Barkley in the end (232). Significantly, this is precisely Helen Ferguson’s concern when Henry finally catches up with her and Barkley in Stresa. “You’re in some mess,” Ferguson says, recognizing the danger Henry is in as a deserter. “I know the mess you’ve gotten this girl into. … you had a love affair all summer and got this girl with child and now I suppose you’ll sneak off” (246-47). Henry’s response is simple but resonant: “I get in my own messes.” He does not deny how bad his previous conduct looks but rather acknowledges his responsibility for his actions and his attachment to Barkley and their child (he has known about their son since before the Caporetto retreat [137-38]). To phrase it romantically, Henry declares himself a deserter of war, not a deserter of love. Certainly Henry’s choice simultaneously gratifies his own desires to “eat and drink and sleep with Catherine,” and to some extent his reunion with Barkley further endangers her, although the risks of being a pregnant foreign nurse or single mother in Europe in 1917 cannot be entirely negligible (333). Still, in casting off his other attachments to dedicate himself to his relationship with Barkley, Henry shows his “wish to do things for” her as he attempts to mature his love into sacrificial action.8

As lack of love blinds characters to the value of life in A Farewell to Arms, the increasing maturation of Barkley and Henry’s love illuminates the meaning and shape of their experiences. For example, Charles J. Nolan notes that “morbid preoccupation with worthlessness” and “excessive or inappropriate guilt” about an unchangeable past often characterize clinical depression, and Barkley exhibits both these symptoms (among many others) when she first meets Henry (109, 119). However, Barkley takes her first steps toward recovery and a meaningful sense of her own self-worth in the Milan hospital, where she begins “talking about her prior emotional state as something in the past” (111; my emphasis). Around this same time, when Henry and Ferguson have their first argument about whether Barkley and Henry will actually marry, Henry tells the reader in an aside that their love has already infused their union with all the formal meaning of a marriage: “We said to each other that we were married the first day she had come to the hospital and we counted months from our wedding day” (108-9, 114). Perhaps riled by Ferguson, Henry does
bring up the possibility of a state wedding again, but Barkley answers easily, “I couldn’t be any more married. … I’m you. Don’t make up a separate me” (115-16).

Barkley’s erasure of her individuality (like Maria’s in For Whom the Bell Tolls) has infuriated critics for years—indeed, Millicent Bell goes so far as to call Barkley an “inflated rubber woman available at will to the onanistic dreamer” (114). But reading Barkley’s words in terms of human attachment and the illuminating love that can exist between people casts a very different light on this conversation. Having just positioned herself as Henry’s “wife” (115-16), Barkley’s “there isn’t any me” comment becomes a deployment of the liturgical language of Genesis 2:24, which is a staple reading at Christian weddings: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one” (my emphasis). In this context, Barkley’s collapsing into Henry implies Henry’s collapsing into Barkley: There is no separate “him” either. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Henry fails to understand how the love growing between them has elided both their individualities, and he asks again if a private wedding might bestow some sort of significance on their relationship. Barkley patiently explains: “You see, darling, it would mean everything to me if I had any religion. … You’re my religion. You’re all I’ve got” (116). By invoking religion, one of the traditional narratives that attempts to give meaning to lived experience, and by conflating religion, Henry, and herself into a single being—so they are the same subjects and objects of a mutual love—Barkley essentially argues that her life only has meaning because of the love that exists between them. Much later, when Barkley and Henry have reunited after the Caporetto retreat, Count Greffi will similarly hint at the relationship between love and religion: “Then too you are in love. Do not forget that is a religious feeling” (263). As Bernard Oldsey interprets, “Catherine Barkley and Count Greffi [both teach] Lt. Henry that the love of God and the love of a woman can be part of the same religion” (184).

Love highlights the meaning of lived experience in a general sense, and further A Farewell to Arms presents a world in which attachments illuminated by stronger loves make stronger meanings, thereby overshadowing the meanings of less loving attachments. Barkley and Henry’s stay at the train-side hotel in Milan demonstrates this, though most critics have found this scene to be “bleak” or, worse, a “reductive and repetitive amorous taxonomy … [that] make[s] Catherine an empty girl, a cipher” (Beversluis 23; Norris 699). That the red plush, mirrors, and satin coverlet make Barkley feel “like a whore” is
certainly unfortunate, but then again, the hotel managers designed the room for such sexual encounters; while concerning, it is unsurprising that the furnishings convey that meaning to Barkley (152). Henry tries to reassure her (“you’re not a whore”), but still she sounds “dry and flat.” It is only later, after they eat and have sex, that Henry remarks: “we felt very happy and in a little time the room felt like our own home. My room at the hospital had been our own home and this room was our home too in the same way” (153; my emphasis). Barkley still makes ironic comments about the fixtures (“the red plush is really fine. It’s just the thing”), but she no longer fears being defined by her surroundings.9 The love they share allows them to see themselves as woman and husband at home, and that meaning supplants the meaning that the room’s designers intended.

A similar succession of meanings plays out in the mountains outside Montreux, where Barkley and Henry rent a cottage after their escape from Italy by boat. Unfortunately, Carlos Baker’s often cited pastoral reading of the mountain as “home” makes it hard to see this passage differently (102), and, admittedly, the beginning of Book V is stunningly idyllic: “Sitting up in bed eating breakfast we could see the lake and the mountains across the lake on the French side. There was snow on the tops of the mountains and the lake was a gray steel-blue” (289). Up to this point, however, Henry’s narrative has more often demonized pastoral spaces, starting in the tone-setting first chapter: “The vineyards were thin and bare-branched too and all the country wet and brown and dead with the autumn” (4). Many gruesome war scenes take place in the Italian countryside, too, only a few minutes’ walk from the mountains or a rustic stone farmhouse. Further, barring Barkley’s death, her most stressful experience with Henry—the row across the lake from Stresa to Brissago—takes place in the sort of Romantic scene Victor Frankenstein might occupy, while their first “lovely summer” is in Milan (112), and many of their other happy times take place in cities such as Lausanne. In the broader context of the novel, then, it is not the mountain and the lake that bring such peace to the opening of Book V; rather, the love that Barkley and Henry share between them illuminates the environment around them, assigning it a new, richer meaning.

To see best the starkness of the contrast Henry’s narrative posits between the empty gloom opened by the lack of love and the brilliant meaning made visible by loving attachment, a last example comes from Henry’s train ride from the Venetian plain to Mestre, which is one of the main fulcra between
the war narrative and Barkley and Henry's love story. In the Caporetto retreat, Henry has already betrayed how loveless most of his human attachments really are. Though he loves Barkley deeply, he sacrifices little for the ambulance drivers under him and shoots an Italian sergeant without compunction, minutes before shooing two homeless virgins toward the frontlines of the German offensive. In the presence of such loveless attachments, Aymo's death and the sergeant's shooting carry little meaning except a loss of feeling, a numbness. On the other hand, as soon as Henry stows himself on the Mestre train, he begins to fantasize about the woman he loves: “I could remember Catherine but I knew I would get crazy if I thought about her when I was not sure yet I would see her, so I would not think about her, only about her a little” (231). Although Henry does not specifically identify why thinking about Barkley should make him “crazy,” the juxtaposition of his fantasy with his environment (“hard floor for a wife”) recalls the detestable disparity between “honorable” war narratives and the brutal facts of wartime violence (232; Norris 693). In this context, remembering the radiant love that attaches him to Barkley threatens to expose and override the meaninglessness of his present experience in the retreat, thus rendering it unlivable. Henry must think “only a little” about Barkley because she personifies the promise of felt meaning that will spur him on to Stresa. Yet, as Merrill notes, “what we call love can be just as ‘obscene’ as glory, honor, or courage,” and it is the danger of abstracting their love—of disembodying it and making it another easy fantasy of the war story—that so frightens Henry (577). Significantly, “love” does not ultimately make Henry’s list of obscenities because he successfully “gives himself to … love in the flesh, something as concrete as the name of a river” (Merrill 577). As Barkley recovered from her “craziness” in Milan, so Henry’s movement to Stresa and his lover, like a migrating bird drawn to a night-light beacon, allows his body to catch up with the illuminating love existing between them.

**Love’s Labor Lost: Barkley’s Death and The Loss of Love**

In all fairness, a reading of *A Farewell to Arms* so invested in love’s capacity to illuminate life does appear to stumble spectacularly at the end of this novel when Barkley and their baby die, and Henry is left alone to walk “back to the hotel in the rain” (332). Certainly Beversluis believes so, agreeing with Richard Lewis that Henry “is downright relieved when [Barkley] dies” (24). Beversluis admits that such a statement will strike starry-eyed romantics as “alarmingly crude and insensitive,” yet he maintains that “it bespeaks a greater fidelity to
the novel than those too many attempts to find in it the nonexistent sense of the tragic” (25). Fifteen years later Wilhelm more charitably allows that Henry feels a “profound loss” at Barkley’s death. Still, Wilhelm is equally pessimistic about the reality of their love, arguing that Henry’s concern over Barkley’s Cesarean scar could not possibly be genuine anxiety11 but must be “Henry’s strategic method of commenting on his guilt regarding the tragic outcome of a wartime romance that had been a game all along” (76). Certainly Henry’s series of repetitive meals, his pile of empty saucers, and his “not thinking at all” on the day of Barkley’s death do signal psychical absence and a breakdown of meaning, but guilt and relief are hardly the most compelling explanations for the mass of behaviors and beliefs that have brought Henry and Barkley to Montreux and their final chapter (Wilhelm 76; FTA 329; Beversluis 23). Critics have naturally responded to the lack of love that overshadows the ending of the novel, but some have over-thought Henry’s role, obscuring the more direct reading that the lack of love stems simply from Barkley’s death and the discontinuation of her ability to generate love for Henry and receive his love in return.

It should be noted here that love—even according to this reading—is no panacea or St. Anthony; it does not offer guarantees of life, happiness, or safe conduct. While Barkley’s death is thematically vital, there is nothing sinister about it. Henry can worry all he wants that Barkley’s fatal labor is a judgment for their illicit union, yet he knows very well that “it would have been the same if we had been married fifty times” (320). Direct maternal death still happens every day, and medicine a hundred years ago was not what it is today. The twenty-first-century reader should also bear in mind Dodman’s contention that Henry’s “entire narrative … inscribes a continued struggle with the debilitating aftereffects associated with shell shock” (249). Thus the assumption that Henry, if he truly loved Barkley, would respond to her impending death with coherent reflections on all that she means to him or outbursts of heartfelt emotion is preposterous. As Natalie Carter notes, traumas often leave victims with such a sense of alienation that they feel they belong “more to the world of the dead than the living,” a state of being that perfectly describes Henry’s “not thinking at all” (20). Similarly, Carter’s observation that traumas (especially sexual ones) impel survivors “both to withdraw from intimate relationships and cling to them desperately” matches both Henry’s and Barkley’s wildly oscillating behavior with each other (22). Even Elisabeth Kübler-Ross’s model for “normal” grief outlines denial as the first stage, and so Henry’s meals out and
his avoidance of the operating theater—after Barkley has been saying things such as “Sometimes I know I’m going to die”—need not necessarily reflect something beyond war trauma, grief, and fear (323).

Barkley’s impending death, which single-handedly plunges the last pages of Henry’s story into meaninglessness, draws much of its impact from the lovelessness of Henry’s other human attachments. As previously mentioned, he shared sincere affection with some of his army fellows, especially Rinaldi and the priest, but he consciously broke from them (“that life was over”) when he deserted the Italian front to seek out his famous “separate peace” (233, 243). Indeed, Michael S. Reynolds reads a “movement into isolation” as the primary development of Book III and the Caporetto retreat, which he identifies as the “key structural chapter of the novel” (273). Henry even excludes his “skinned rabbit” of a son from the bounds of his love, as is only too obvious when the nurse asks him “Aren’t you proud of your son?” and he answers, “No. … He nearly killed his mother” (325-26). In the face of Barkley’s death, then, Henry actually finds himself no better off than the cynic Rinaldi. Though Rinaldi attempted to hide his sense of meaninglessness with downcast looks and self-deprecating humor, and Henry denies Barkley’s loss through drinking and “not thinking at all,” both are seeking to escape the same harsh emptiness caused by lack of love. Of course, Henry cannot ultimately refute his situation, as the last paragraph of A Farewell to Arms confronts him squarely with Barkley’s dead body. Norris reads Barkley’s “fate [as] virtually allegorical: … a gesture cruelly figurative of her poetic status as male echo in this text,” but what Norris does not reckon with is the fact that both Barkley’s dead baby and her dead body do not mean anything to Henry anymore (700). “It wasn’t any good,” Henry says, “it was like saying good-by to a statue” (332). The woman who loved him, and whom he loved, is dead, and as the human attachment has broken so has the meaning drained from her body.

In these last paragraphs of A Farewell to Arms, it again becomes indispensable that Hemingway metaphorically knit the love story and the war narrative together. As Pozorski observes, Henry’s “surprising comparison” between his infant’s death and the deaths of his fellow soldiers creates an analogy that makes the “infant’s death ultimately appear as ‘gratuitous’ as Aymo’s death” (76-77).12 This analogy may not seem particularly interesting because reading it one way—in which the war fatalities reflect on the child’s death—only confirms what Henry and Pozorski have already told their readers: that Barkley and her son died just as “unreasonably” as Aymo. However, reading the anal-
ogy the other way—where Barkley’s death and the child’s death reflect on the war fatalities—reveals an implication that severely compounds the horrors of the Great War and makes sense of *A Farewell to Arms*’s reputation as a great American war novel. In the same way that Henry loved Barkley so fixedly that his life loses most of its love and tangible meaning in her absence, other people may have loved Aymo, Bonello, or the sergeant that Henry shot. What makes the Great War so tragic is not death-as-an-abstraction, muddy fields, or dismembered bodies, but the fact that it multiplied by millions the same loss of love and disconnection between cherished lovers and friends that Henry and Barkley experienced.

**Conclusion: Love and the Hemingway Text**

However the “Papa Hemingway” myth came to be, this icon of a “macho and unsentimental writer of hunting and fishing exhibitions, tales of love and war, heroic wounds, and true modernist apathy” (Pozorski 76) can make it difficult for today’s readers to see that *A Farewell to Arms* presents a world in which love is a magnetically attractive force that—like a beam of light—illuminates life with a sense of meaning. Frederic Henry’s story makes this point by painting war and its corollary narratives as weaponized lacks of love, which are necessarily accompanied by the breakdown of felt meaning. Further, it presents a love plot that provides a positive example of how selflessness and sacrifice can make visible stronger meanings in the experiences and environments surrounding those who love and are loved. From this perspective, the tragic conclusion serves as a warning that death and loss do happen in life—this complicated journey that is always both domestic and foreign, private and public—and that love is no panacea that humans can passively consume but a way of life that should extend beyond a self or exclusive group that is “alone against the world” (249).

Not insignificantly, many of *A Farewell to Arms*’s themes and situations play out in Hemingway’s other books, including the twinning and psychical union of romantic pairs, feelings of purposelessness, expressions of human misery, the relationship between religion and war, and the quality of rural spaces and sport. These common threads beg the question of whether or not Hemingway’s other works offer a similar conclusion; or in other words, is *Farewell* a youthful experiment subsequently discarded, or is it the manifestation of a belief in love that came to define Hemingway’s later artistic career as well? A few studies such as Robert Lewis’s *Hemingway on Love* (1965) and Robert Cro-
zier’s “For Thine Is the Power and the Glory: Love in For Whom the Bell Tolls” (1974) have attempted to answer this question in the past. However, given how inescapable this question appears to be for twenty-first-century critics such as Wilhelm and Dodman, perhaps it is time again for critics to face head on the intersection between the Hemingway Text and love.

NOTES

1. The student of modern British responses to war will appreciate how Henry’s “embarrassment” with language-shrouded violence directly anticipates George Orwell’s 1946 essay, “Politics and the English Language.” In this essay, Orwell expresses his revulsion at the “euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness” of World War II propaganda that screened acts of “folly, hatred, and schizophrenia” (281-82).

2. While this reading may occlude the millions of domestic human attachments that coalesce into a nationalistic sense of crown and country—in which context death in the line of duty appears as a loving act of self-sacrifice—it is important to note Hemingway’s own intense disgust after World War I. In his “Notes on the Next War” (1935), Hemingway describes war as murder and slavery: “The only way to combat the murder that is war is to show the dirty combinations that make it and the criminals and swine that hope for it and the idiotic way they run it when they get it so that an honest man will distrust it as he would a racket and refuse to be enslaved into it” (BL 210). Even in For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940), which Michael K. Solow argues is “an incitement to wage a particular war while hating war in general” (105), the admission of a specific just war is severely complicated by characters such as Pablo “getting off” on war, or characters like Golz who play war as a game. In his staunch anti-war stance, Hemingway stands with contemporaries such as Orwell and Carl Sandburg (e.g., “Buttons”) while also tapping into a literary tradition including predecessors such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who takes to task the ruling classes in “Fears in Solitude” (1798) for shrouding war in “dainty terms for fratricide” (112).

3. For the pervasive expectations placed on turn-of-the-century European soldiers concerning their behavior with each other, the enemy, and prostitutes, see Greg Winston’s “Gorescarred Books” and “Barracks and Brothels” in Joyce and Militarism.

4. See pages 11 ff. for a discussion of the end of Book II and Barkley and Henry’s attachment of maturing love.

5. For a thorough analysis of Catherine “Scotch and Crazy” Barkley’s symptoms of depression, see Charles J. Nolan’s “‘A Little Crazy’: Psychiatric Diagnoses of Three Hemingway Women Characters.”

6. The reader may also note Barkley’s sacrifice of sleep and her constant medical attentions: “I don’t want anyone else to touch you. I’m silly. I get furious if they [the other nurses] touch you” (103).

7. Beversluis (1989) and Dodman (2006) are only two of the more vocal critics in this camp.

8. Michael S. Reynolds also notes how the felt meaningfulness of Henry’s attachments to Barkley and the Italian army shift decisively with the Caporetto retreat: “[Henry and Barkley’s] relationship gives them an identity separate from the group identity of war. As their relationship deepens, the institutions that have supported western civilization become increasingly meaningless to them” (272; my emphasis).
9. Again, contemporary critics must bear in mind that there is no way to access Barkley’s “real” words or thoughts: Henry’s voice saturates the entire narrative. As evidence for the values and conclusions Henry has come to in response to the horrors of World War I, however, Barkley’s words still support the argument of this essay.

10. Henry’s other sexual fantasy of “my love Catherine” during the Caporetto retreat comes two pages after Aymo begins harassing the virgins, creating another pointed contrast between the relationships of love and war (195, 197).

11. As A Farewell to Arms’s readers have already seen, Henry can be a worrier (115), and Barkley has demonstrated a definite insecurity about her body image, even in the face of imminent arrest (266).

12. Henry’s “surprising comparison” refers to the following passage: “Poor little kid. I wished to hell I’d been choked like that. … That was what you did. You died. … They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you. Or they killed you gratuitously like Aymo. Or gave you syphilis like Rinaldi. But they killed you in the end” (327).

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