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Item Type	Essay
Publisher	Centro de Publicaciones Académicas, Facultad de Artes y Ciencias, Universidad de Puerto Rico en Mayagüez
Download date	2025-05-22 01:29:12
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11801/3086

“[T]HE VERY WORST...THE OLDEST, DEEPEST FEAR”: MASCULINE ANXIETY AND MALE RESPONSES TO EMASCULATORY THREATS IN MARTHA GELLHORN’S *POINT OF NO RETURN*

Peter Nagy

“The turn of the century,” writes Christopher Breu, “marked a gradual but decisive shift in the cultural ideology of what constituted a valorized male identity, moving from the older discourse of manliness to a newer celebration of an active, exteriorized, and more violent conception of masculinity...” (6). In opposition to the Victorian model of manliness as genteel, intellectual, and moral, twentieth-century American constructions of manhood came to emphasize physical attributes over interior qualities. Accordingly, the male body became integral to cultural conceptions of masculinity and with “the late nineteenth century and the rise of the physical culture movement, the body itself important to definitions of masculinity” (Jarvis 5). Additionally, with the body as a vital component of manhood, athletic prowess, strength and appearance became the litmus test for manhood.

This incipient conception largely emerged in response to threats against masculinity perceived in changing socioeconomic circumstances, especially the enervated status of masculinity precipitated by the Great Depression—in which many men lost their breadwinner status—and the rise of commercial culture and technology (Jarvis). While efforts were taken to remedy damaged models of American masculinity, it was not until the Second World War that major transformations to conceptions of manhood transpired. With the United States’s full-scale mobilization surfaced representations of males as “physiologically intact, well-muscled steeled entities” (Jarvis 87). As Michael Kimmel and John Adams note, World War II, for many, represented an opportunity for masculine regeneration, a proving ground in which men could regain their identities as “providers and

protectors," and revive the breadwinner image weakened in the unmanning Depression (Kimmel 147). But the insidiousness of war betrayed any optimism for the rejuvenation of American manhood, and the concept of a physically tough, machine-like masculinity collided with the challenges of battle (Adams 66).

As modern American masculinity became tied to the male body, the potential physical harm of war became particularly threatening. In World War II, wounds resulting from "combat, accidents, and other diseases offered more serious challenges to servicemen's bodies and masculine ideals" (Jarvis 85). Battle's capacity to penetrate or sever men—via bullets, mines, and shelling¹—undermined the cultural definition of manhood predicated upon the idea of an impenetrable and whole male body. Martha Gellhorn's literary representation of the Second World War, *Point of No Return*, belies the early twentieth-century idea of battle as a locus of masculine renovation by capturing the male anxiety that resulted from wartime pressures on manhood. In the text, protagonists attempt to salvage their identities as men from a war fraught with numerous emasculatory threats, such as the weapons that produce abject masculinities by severing, penetrating, or somehow injuring an otherwise coherent male body fundamental to the construction of masculine normalcy.²

Of the little scholarship that attends to *Point of No Return*, many criticisms discuss the text in relation to Gellhorn's journalism or war-time politics, but surprisingly few focus on the underlying theme of masculine anxiety. Evincing Gellhorn's realism, Giovanna Dell'Orto, for instance, suggests that the author tackles the issue of veteran re-adjustment with Lieutenant Colonel Smithers. In a similar vein, Phyllis Lassner, who writes that Gellhorn argues for the morality of the conflict, characterizes Jacob Levy as an embodiment of "a generalized and continuous history of Jewish persecution and survival" standing against the Nazi war-machine (807). Though cogent, such readings overlook the fear that drives the Levy and Smithers narratives and underlies *Point of No Return*, a novel whose main protagonist significantly describes castration as "the very worst...the oldest, deepest fear" (*Point* 277). Levy's thematizing of castration centralizes the fear

¹ Christina Jarvis describes shelling as especially threatening: "A destructive technology that could atomize bodies from a great distance, shelling threatened both the wholeness of the body and the masculinity of men who could not directly confront this enemy fire" (93).

² Jarvis's term refers to the war's "hundreds of thousands of physically and emotionally injured men who represented damaged masculinity in one form or another" (102).

of emasculation and establishes male anxiety as a lens by which to read Gellhorn's novel.

Aside from the literal removal of the phallus, castration in *Point of No Return* metonymically represents the emasculations present in the various threats to the male body, but especially the emasculating effect of what Kaja Silverman calls a psychic disintegration—that is, the disintegration of masculinity's "bound and armored ego, predicated upon the illusion of coherence and control" (62). Often resulting from the trauma of war, this breakdown of masculinity leads men to seek remasculinization in various ways, sometimes through female submission. This essay examines masculine anxiety in *Point of No Return*, as it stems from subversions of manhood consisting in battle's production of abject masculinities and the deterioration of the illusion of control. Accordingly, I contend that the protagonists' fears are specific to the tension between their identities as men and their experiences of the emasculating conditions of battle.

I begin by discussing the masochistic rituals of Marvin Busch and Royal Lummox, but primarily trace the theme of masculine anxiety through three protagonists—Bill Gaylord, Lieutenant Colonel Smithers, and Jacob Levy. Responding to threats to manhood, these soldiers defend their masculine identities, either in relationships, where women serve as "others" against which they define manliness, such as the parallel romantic flings of Lieutenant Colonel Smithers and Jacob Levy, or in the escape offered by hypermasculine fantasies, such as Bill Gaylord. As castration poses the greatest fear, I argue that the "hope" (56) Levy additionally thematizes not only relates to general survival, but the salvation of manhood. Consistent with *Point of No Return's* prevailing sense of hopelessness, however, I conclude that these endeavors for remasculinization are in vain. Just as her novel undermines the notion that war produces "real" men, Gellhorn's conclusion betrays any optimism for masculine rejuvenation as it lingers with a sense of war's futility and the impossibility of a return to normalcy.

Perhaps the most conspicuous example of male anxiety manifests in the masochistic rituals of Marvin Busch and Royal Lommax. In these spectacles, which seem almost parodic of the hypermasculine displays one finds in Hemingway, Busch, who consumes the shards from a broken light bulb, and Lommax, who drops a knife blade between his toes, act out what Christina Jarvis labels "instances of malingering," in which men reveal the extent to which they desire "to escape the possibility of more extensive bodily injury—damage over which they would have no control" (93). These self-destructive acts, Jarvis notes, ironically derive from the urge to "preserve the appear-

ance of masculinity and the wholeness of the body" (93). Though neither Lommax nor Busch incurs any physical damage, the machistic entertainment in which each partakes appears a defensive act, an attempt to preserve, as Kaja Silverman defines it, the veneer of masculine self-control in a minatory and largely uncontrolled war, where a man loses dominion over his body to the happenstances of battle.

The remasculinizing rituals of Lommax and Busch serve as a paradigm for the journeys of Gaylord, Smithers, and Levy, who similarly attempt to return to a sense of masculine normalcy. In *Point of No Return*, threats to manhood surface in the physical injuries that undermine the notion of an impenetrable male body (the aforementioned abject masculinities), which Lieutenant Colonel Smithers surveys in a casualty list laden with "Head wounds, trench feet, pneumonia, the punctured, the dismembered, and the plain dead: dead getting nowhere...dead for nothing" (31). As a servicemen, Bill Gaylord undoubtedly encounters such treacheries, but his anxiety particularly results from the discomfort produced by male proximity, the smells that make closeness akin to "those outdoor gent's rooms in Paris" (31), and more specifically from the inescapable emasculations he perceives resulting from this closeness. For Gaylord, neither the outside, where the cold might "freeze your balls off" (32), nor the inside, where "You couldn't even stretch your legs without kicking some-one in the crotch" (32), provides a safe haven from the unmanly environment of war.

Gaylord responds to these potential emasculations by escaping "into his favorite paperbound world"—books that mark a last "refuge" (194) from a life "stifled in boredom" (194) and a reality failing to mirror the promises of fantasy: "Everything panned out badly, war and peace; nothing was ever enough, shiny enough, fast enough, never as gallant, exciting and stylish as he wished" (194-195). But the novels signify more than an evasion of general ennui; for Gaylord, they are temporary rescues from war-specific fears, especially threats to his masculine identity. Fittingly, the fantasies in which he frequently hides himself are hypermasculine novels that involve "hard-faced men" who always escort "frightened platinum blondes, draped with rubies" (32). Central to this imaginary world is the "infallible man, the private detective" with "his magic appeal to women, all women" (32). And, as Gaylord states, only when reading these male-dominated texts is he "comfortable" (85).

In reading Saint's adventures, Bill Gaylord recalls the twentieth-century conception of masculinity reflected in and informed by the private-detective story, a cultural fantasy, Christopher Breu writes,

that usually features a “hard-boiled male” detective “characterized by a tough, shell-like exterior, a prophylactic toughness,” and by emotional detachment (1). Additionally, these hard-boiled detective stories often include the femme fatale—also seen in the gambling, murderous women of Gaylord’s paperbound worlds—who functions as “the gendered figure through which the hard-boiled male narrates a larger sense of cultural loss and betrayal toward which he places his displaced aggression and self-loathing” (Breu 71). The femme fatale is a “whorish” figure that threatens male superiority and autonomy, whom the lone detective suppresses in order to assert his supremacy.

Bill Gaylord’s fiction serves as a microcosm for his real-life environment. Not unlike war, Breu asserts, the urban battle central to hard-boiled narratives is “just as chaotic and confusing, the weapons are just as deadly, and the struggle is as potentially pointless” (15). Yet, as they are worlds that the invincible detective always conquers, Gaylord’s fantasies serve as sanctuaries from his war-driven anxieties. Breu suggests that the “hard-boiled masculinity” of detective novels “represents an aggressive reformulation of male hegemony as much as a defensive reaction to what might have been perceived as a set of economic and social threats to this hegemony” (5). Though Breu defines hard-boiled fiction as a response to the emergence of corporate capitalism, for Gaylord it counteracts dangers specific to his context. Responding to the potential emasculations he perceives in the cold weather, male proximity, and the general vulnerability of the male body exposed by battle injuries, Gaylord attempts to re-masculinize himself through the powerful, tough-exterior maleness of detective stories.

Yet the emasculating conditions of battle are only one threat to which Gaylord’s novels attend. The reality of the “good old home front” similarly haunts Gaylord’s sense of manliness, as it reduces him to “a two room apartment with a woman who sulked and quarreled and lived like a slut and blamed you for not being rich” (*Point* 194). Not a perfect mirror of the femme fatale, Gaylord’s wife, as he describes her, nonetheless cuts a whorish figure—a “bitch” that, in grabbing “all his money” and treating him “like dirt,” deflates his bread-winner identity and undercuts the hegemony he attempts to salvage through his hypermasculine detective stories (193). The hard-boiled fiction, therefore, reacts against the enervated manhood that Gaylord additionally experiences at home. Accordingly, the appeal of the male detective is not only his tough, unaffected exterior, but the opulence and magically irresistible sexuality lacking in Gaylord’s own masculinity—a quality that might resolve the domestic issue of

his wife's supposed promiscuity.

But Gaylord cannot sustain his dream of ideal masculinity, because threats, both warlike and domestic, constantly intrude. The remasculinizing escapes are but temporary comforts that cannot remedy the "meemies" nor rectify a dissolving marriage (162). The fantasies fail Gaylord, who desires, but does not possess, the invincibility and magnetic sexuality of the hard-boiled detective. Indeed, his life resembles a bleak inversion of his idealistic fictions. Unlike the urban crime scene of hard-boiled narratives, war is a constant and unconquerable battle in which real men are severed, or killed; and instead of an undeniable attraction to his magical sexuality, Gaylord's wife wishes for divorce. Attempting to adopt the unaffectedness of a fictional detective, Gaylord nevertheless remains emotionally defeated. Out of frustration, he rips the covers from one of his novels, symbolically destroying the dream of an ideal masculinity that refuses to translate into reality.

Suitably, Bill Gaylord's demise occurs subsequently to the news of divorce, when he finally runs "out of books" (194) in which to salvage his sense of manhood. Deprived of manly fictions, Gaylord tries remasculinizing himself on the battlefield. As Jarvis states, "during World War II the myth 'that combat was the ultimate test of the soldier's courage and manhood' was still very much alive. Thus wounds incurred while fighting bravely, in the context of killing a large number of enemy soldiers or taking a key location, could bestow honor or a sense of purpose to the individual" (94). Jarvis's description suits Gaylord, who, following emotional and psychological wounds—"meemies" and divorce—rekindles his interest in warfare and seeks the thrill of combat. Gaylord perceives battle not only as remedying life's stifling boredom, but as "a time when a man has to take matters in his own hands" (199), a proving ground in which to regain a feeling of control and secure an attenuated manhood. Yet his endeavor for remasculinization, proves self-undermining and otiose, because, unlike the fictional, all-conquering, hard-boiled males, Gaylord is a vulnerable male, easily killed in the treacheries of battle.

The emasculating conditions of war similarly drive Lieutenant Colonel Smithers to seek remasculinization. Threats to the male body are not explicit in his narrative, but one must understand that, as leader of the platoon, the colonel is fully aware of the abject masculinities produced in warfare, especially as he studies the "casualty list" (31) rife with descriptions of permeated, severed, and destroyed male bodies. Moreover, recognizing his own leadership as "acting" (39), Smithers acknowledges his lack of control in a war where must continually send men to their deaths. In addition, the subversion of

masculinity implicit in Gaylord's divorce compounds the colonel's subjection to chaos and abject maleness; it personally affronts Smithers, who universalizes the threat by condemning all women as "goddam whores" who, by disrupting traditional gender roles, act unfeminine, and thus, "ought to shave their heads," or shed their feminine disguises (193).

Dreams about returning to a life of socioeconomic prestige comprise one mode of escape for Smithers. While Giovanna Dell'Orto shrewdly identifies that Gellhorn tackles issues of domestic readjustment in Smithers's "dreams about peace and love at home," she overlooks the male-female interactions prominent in the colonel's wistful fantasies (8). Along with opulence and high social status, the colonel's dreams involve power relationships with females characterized by feminine "weakness"—a nineteenth- and twentieth-century male concept, Anthony Rotundo notes, describing appealing females as dependent, dainty, and gently submissive, such that they offset a man's assumed natural aggression, boldness, and self-confidence: "To men, feminine dependence dramatized their own hard-won independence and, in so doing, affirmed their sense of manhood" (106). In Smithers's fantasies, the modern-male conception of feminine appeal predicated upon daintiness and acquiescence materializes in the daughters of high-class, Georgian families, with whom the colonel frequently imagines himself.

As with Bill Gaylord and his detective novels, the colonel seeks to regain a sense of masculine power. Imagining himself a self-confident male conqueror of coy, acquiescent women dressed with hair like a "floating mist of gold," and a "delicate string of pearls," Smithers seems to enact Silverman's claim that males often react to war's destruction of the illusion of masculine control by requiring a submissive response from women: "And he knew what she wanted: indulgently, triumphantly, he put his arm around her and drew her close. It'll be much better on the way home, he thought, when we're parked and I can use both hands. 'Johnny,' she sighed, snuggling against him, 'I belong to you'" (*Point* 7). Girlish submissiveness and dependence are essential to Smithers's imaginative libidinal game, because, without them, the colonel would be unable to enjoy a sense of triumph, to contrast, and thereby, reaffirm the control and aggression integral to his sense of masculinity. Fittingly, he tosses aside the "too easy" (7) Elise for the smaller and more fragile Mary, as the promiscuity of the former threatens to disrupt his cat-and-mouse fantasy.

In his sexual pursuit of Dorothy Brock—whom the colonel reduces to "Dotty"—Smithers attempts to literalize his fantasies about hegemonic manliness. That Dorothy Brock figures as a sexual object—like

Mary and Elise—whom the colonel is “in a hurry” to lead “down the hall to the last bedroom and the advertised soft bed” (70-71) is evident in the initial, explicitly physical survey in which Smithers sexually appraises and objectifies the Red Cross girl: “She’s got pretty hair, I like that color brown, Lieutenant Colonel Smithers thought, pretty ankles, a good build, the kind that went all to the chest and nothing to the hips. She’s not too hot in the face, he went on, weighing what he’d got...” (70). But, simultaneously, Smithers’s recognition that “there was something disturbing about her face too, or her eyes, as if she thought different from what she was saying” interrupts his catalogue, and more importantly, anticipates the disruption of his sexual pursuit effected by Dotty’s “disturbing” qualities (70).

What the colonel only superficially registers is the bleakness that lurks beneath Dotty’s appealing exterior—that is, the war’s corruption of her perception of love and intimacy. Dorothy Brock feels obligated to don the feminine veneer, but, at the same time, wishes to quit the “lies” (75), to embrace the hidden reality of a woman defeated by war—a woman for whom the old dialogue between men and women—that of “sympathy, jokes, and advice” (71)—has become an apathetic and perfunctory routine: “Like working in a button factory, she thought, you could punch button holes all day long but you wouldn’t have to think about buttons” (71). The corruption of intimacy and perversion of love for Dotty surfaces in her bleak observations, especially as she notes the war’s mutation of romance into prostitution by likening the houses to “bordels for ladies” (70) and remarking that liquor glasses have become the new staple of femininity. Dotty’s dismal outlook additionally derives from the fact of her friend’s loss of a lover, in light of which she discovers that war’s transmutation of authentic intimacy and love into danger. Much like the initial Jacob Levy, who perceives hope as vulnerability, Dotty is a hopeless figure who protects herself by remaining unaffected—all she wants “is not to have anything” (112).

This disillusionment catalyzes the miscommunications and the ideological gap between Dotty, who only wishes to leave her date with the colonel and cannot reciprocate his pretend sentiment—“‘Dotty,’ he whispered, ‘I love you, darling’...‘Of course you do,’ Dorothy Brock murmured” (76)—and Smithers, who wants “everything complete with lies” (75). Though the war destroys Dotty’s hope by transforming authentic affection and communication into a mechanical charade, Smithers still hopes for a post-war return to normalcy and a family in Georgia with a “good girl,” “white picket fence,” and “toddlers” (110). Accordingly, even though his initial intentions are purely sexual, the colonel wishes to maintain a sense of “decency” (74), to

sustain the pretences that Dorothy Brock can no longer support. A hopeful man and a defeated woman, Lieutenant Colonel Smithers and Dorothy Brock suitably climb “into bed from *opposite* sides” (75, italics added).

Due to the war’s perversion of romance, Dorothy Brock cannot “perform” (75) the part of the idealistically submissive female that Smithers can aggressively pursue in order to regain his masculinity. The colonel craves sex, but desires it wrapped in a coy submissiveness like the shy and dependent girls of his socioeconomic fantasies, around whom he protectively wraps an arm. Consequently, while he hopes to remasculinize himself with Dotty, her methodical approach to, and willingness towards, sex frustrates his libidinal game: “No respectable girl, where he lived, would behave like Dotty...[she] made him feel cheated and disgusted” (74). The colonel cannot play the aggressive male because Dotty already assumes the role by aggressively seeking and expediting the sexual process in a business-like manner (74). This disruption effects a gender-role reversal whereby Smithers acts like the dependent female he desirably imagines, and Dotty, the aggressor, who disgusts the colonel by wanting “it the way a man would” (74), and protector, who reverses the interaction of Smithers’s fantasies by affectionately wrapping her arm around the nightmare-stricken colonel.

Only after Dorothy Brock emotionally falls “to pieces” (112) and behaves “the way Lieutenant Colonel Smithers expected a girl to behave” (113) does the reversal disengage and is the colonel able to find “what it is he wanted” (113)—the role of masculine aggressor/protector. As Dotty displays emotional vulnerability by crying “herself into another girl” (113) she fulfills Smithers’s expectation of coy and dependent femininity: “You could really fall for this girl because you’d know you mattered to her. He was happy undoing her coat and taking off her blouse; happier than he had been when the other Dotty, willing and indifferent, undressed herself. And she still wouldn’t meet his eyes she was shy now, and this made her more desirable than ever” (114). The colonel accordingly reduces the broken Dorothy Brock to an affectionate and needy “sweet kid” (114) against whom he can contrast his manly toughness and autonomy. With this new Dotty, whom Smithers perceives himself paternalistically protecting “as if she were a child on a dangerous street” (113), the colonel regains a sense of power and control, the feeling that “He was in charge now” (114).

Smithers subsequently replaces his old socioeconomic fantasies with a renewed feeling of manliness predicated upon a submissive Dotty—not the real, hardened Dorothy Brock, the colonel admits, but

an ideal construction that requires protection, a "memory suitable to his needs and desires" (192): "Lieutenant Colonel Smithers invented with love a girl named Dorothy Brock...but his plans did not extend beyond finding her, and taking her in his arms..." (192). Like Bill Gaylord, however, Smithers's solacing reveries inexorably collapse on the realities of war, in the defeat of his sense of masculinity built upon a romantic delusion the colonel was bound to lose: "He remembered how he had dreamed about her, from Luxembourg to Hurtgen and all the way back...He had feared though, always that the dream was false; and he could not say she had ever given him grounds for dreams of any kind. So that was over too" (313). Smithers surrenders any hope for the salvation of his manhood, a return to normalcy, and, in his last words, recognizes the futility of a war amounting to nothing more than a loss of "three years of his life" (313).

Before his final emotional surrender, however, Smithers clings to his friendship with Jacob Levy as a last rescue. Critics such as Dell'Orto and Lassner claim that Levy, a Jewish soldier, functions as a symbol of ideological defiance for Smithers: "Kill everybody and not get Levy, our only Jew, when he's what they got their real grudge on. It was like spitting in the krauts' faces, for Levy to survive. Lieutenant Colonel Smithers gave a grunt of laughter and fell asleep" (31). Yet, of equal importance is Smithers's recognition of Levy's pleasing countenance—a face that the colonel significantly compares to that of a movie star. In likening Levy to silver-screen men, Smithers places him among the hard-boiled³, sexually irresistible males of Bill Gaylord's fiction. And Gaylord also perceives in the Jewish soldier an ideal masculinity that might "have the women squirming from New York to California" (19). Tall and "handsome," Levy not only belies the expectation of a "greasy little kike with those eyes they've got," but, for Smithers, who cannot "get over that pan of his" (19), embodies an iconic manliness, and thus, hope for manhood in a war of various emasculations (9-10).

As he believes the colonel's luck will keep him from a possible "third wound" (11), Jacob Levy reciprocally invests hope in Smithers. Even though he seems to agonize over the potential wound simply because of its promise of fatality, Levy specifically attaches the threat to a "minefield" (29). And as Christina Jarvis explains, in World War II, mines,⁴ aside from a general danger, bore the explicit threat of

³ Christopher Breu notes that, after the war, hard-boiled fiction was adapted for the silver screen.

⁴ As Jarvis notes, mines embodied the horror of castration, often considered the worst injury by servicemen: "While in combat, infantry men often crossed their legs

castration, which Levy later designates the “very worst fear” (277). The danger of being unmanned, for Levy, lives not only in the mines, but also the irremediable neurosis he experiences at Wipfel—“But would a man ever be alright [*sic*] again if once his eyes looked like they were glass and he screamed out crazy things he didn’t even hear?” (38). As Smithers remains miraculously unharmed throughout battle, he epitomizes invulnerable masculinity and therefore represents, for Levy, a rescue from emasculatory threats (Breu 87).

Akin to Smithers, Levy, who doubles the colonel throughout the text⁵, seeks to remasculinize himself through a submissive and dependent female—Kathe, a hope “clothed in a body and called by a name,” but also a romantic invention with whom he only imaginatively converses (145). And in his pursuit, Levy echoes Smithers, as his explicitly physical observation exposes his initially sexual intent with the Luxembourg waitress: “Kathe had a nice fat little rear and nice fat little front and good teeth, with a gold filling somewhere when she smiled. And friendly blue eyes and she wore her black hair in a braid around her head...He enjoyed watching Kathe bring in the trays, with her little bottom moving under the thin black wool of her dress” (47-48). Unlike Dotty, whose corruption frustrates Smithers’s pursuit, Kathe, a café waitress who does not “follow or understand the war” (63), remains sexually and emotionally untainted, and thus someone who returns Levy to a sense of masculine normalcy (46). Perceived as a child-like, puppyish innocence, Kathe embodies the feminine coyness and dependence by which Levy contrasts his own aggression and autonomy.

The renewal of Levy’s masculinity comes not only through his sexual transgression, in which he betrays his original nobility by essentially raping the waitress, but by reducing Kathe to an object requiring his paternalistic protection: “‘I’m in a kindergarten bed with a Christmas present doll,’ Jacob Levy thought, and laughed softly but aloud. Then he gathered Kathe in his arms and said, ‘You funny little kid,’ and patted her as if he had been presented with a baby to hold, soothe and put to sleep” (83). Paralleling Smithers’s perception of himself as a paternal nurturer of a helpless Dotty, Levy, figuring the waitress a “dopey kid” and a “lost kitten,” perceives the crying

under shell fire, and bomber crews would frequently sit on their helmets...men frequently privileged the safety of the penis over the rest of the body in order to maintain a sense of phallic masculinity” (87).

⁵ Levy’s frequent sharing of Smithers’s language and his use of Smithers’s name as a pseudonym validates this claim.

Kathe as a "helpless pitiful little creature" who requires his embrace and protection from other predatory men (84).

The attempt at remasculinization continues as Levy imagines himself engaged to Kathe and her caretaker. Replaying the traditional relationship of his parents, he returns to a sense of masculine normalcy by assuming the "responsibilities" (158) of a husband similar to his father, who "was the head of the family, the man who paid" for his mother's various purchases—"egg beaters or lamp shades or sofa cushions or dresser sets or bath salts" (158). Purchasing clothes for Kathe, Levy assumes a breadwinner status and feels like "a man who took care of a woman," just as his father cared for his mother (157). And in this fantasy relationship, Levy retains his role as a paternalistic guardian: "Then too, because of what the sight of Kathe did to him, he had become the old one, the sure one, the man" (152). By assuming the role of provider and a protector standing "between [Kathe] and a hard world which she did not even know about," Levy attains a "life after dark," a renewed sense of manhood built upon "the security of being depended on, the protection of being needed" (158).

The fear of emasculation finally drives Jacob Levy to the self-destructive reprisal at the novel's denouement. Dell'Orto argues that Levy's concluding murder of German civilians marks his sudden personalization of a war in which his Jewish heritage initially meant "a little more prejudice to sustain" (Dell'Orto 8). And Phyllis Lassner similarly sees Levy's rage stemming from his heritage and Levy himself as the force of Gellhorn's polemic against Dachau. Yet, both critics overlook that emasculatory threats are central to Levy's terrifying experience in the death camp. In Dachau, threats to masculinity manifest in two forms: in the castration practices of the torturous Nazis, which present the "oldest, deepest fear" (277) (at the thought of which the soldier's "hand slid down to" protect his genitals), and in the deterioration of femininity present not only in the abject women of Dachau, whom Levy barely recognizes as females, but in the removal of "gold fillings," similar to those of Kathe, and the black hair, similar to that of Levy's mother, from women's bodies (285).

In addition to Jewish heritage, such dangers provide the impetus for the indignant Levy, who attaches emasculatory threats to the Germans. The castrating, women-destroying Germans come to embody a threat to manhood, which the Jewish soldier attempts to run down and destroy. Fittingly, Jacob Levy not only obsesses over the absurdity that "They were murdering people for nothing. For nothing, for nothing, for nothing. For being Jews" (289), but the Nazi affront to the sort of femininity central to Levy's identity as a man. He therefore incessantly reminds himself that, like the women used to

stuff mattresses, “Momma has black hair too, long black hair...My mother has long black hair, my mother has long black hair” (290-291) as he drives onto the “laughing Germans.”

Similar to Bill Gaylord and Lieutenant Colonel Smithers, Levy’s hope for remasculinization proves false, a self-destructive attempt “failed, with anguish.” In running over the Germans, Levy incurs the “third wound” he incessantly dreads by destroying his face, and thus, his most masculine feature, by which Smithers and Gaylord mark him as a tall, good-looking, manly man, and with which he fulfills Kathe’s romantic expectations of American soldiers. Rather than Lassner’s assertion that Gellhorn’s ending “reflects the necessity of ‘the next battle’” (805), the novel closes with the emptiness of victory and the impossibility of a return to normalcy—all of which Bert Hammer recognizes in his enumeration of destroyed and injured companions: “Suddenly, Bert Hammer thought, with real surprise: Marv is dead. Goddamit, Marv was dead and Dan and Roy were shot up bad and the Sarge didn’t have any legs” (265). Even though Levy retraces his hope and rests in optimism, *Point of No Return* concludes with a lingering hopelessness deriving from Dorothy Brock’s attestation of war’s futility and Smithers’s realization that battle earns “nothing, nothing, nothing” (302).

The investigation of Gellhorn’s exploration of masculinity not only exposes the greater complexity of *Point of No Return* unnoted by journalistic studies of the novel but perhaps inaugurates a new area of critical interest for the prolific American novelist, travel writer, and journalist, whose portrayals of male identity have been largely ignored while those of her ex-husband, Ernest Hemingway, have long been examined, debated, and celebrated. Elucidating the masculine discourse within the novel establishes a lens by which to analyze other Gellhorn works and will potentially complicate critical approaches to her fiction and perceptions of the writer herself. And continuing to unearth her gender discourse will perhaps secure Gellhorn greater notice within the canon of modern-American fiction, stock the dearth of critical attention afforded to Gellhorn’s war novel since its incipience, and liberate the author and her work from the immense shadow imposed by Hemingway’s celebrity.

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