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War and Love as Major Themes in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*: A Critical Study

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Abstract

Aims: This study examines *A Farewell to Arms* as Ernest Hemingway's powerful critique of war, focusing on its destructive impact on human relationships. It explores the interplay of love, war, and suffering through Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley, underscoring themes of peace, non-violence, and the futility of armed conflict.

Methodology and Approaches: Using close textual analysis, the paper studies Henry, an American lieutenant in the Italian ambulance service during World War I, and Catherine, a British nurse in Milan. Their relationship is assessed for its emotional, physical, and psychological dimensions. Catherine's devotion and acceptance of societal limits are contrasted with Henry's growing disillusionment with war.

Outcome: Their love deepens after Henry's war injury and recovery under Catherine's care. Catherine's pregnancy and fear of separation prevent marriage. Attempting escape to Switzerland, they face hardships; Catherine dies in childbirth after delivering a stillborn, leaving Henry alone. The tragedy reinforces war's senselessness and the fragility of human joy.

Conclusion and Suggestions: The novel stands as a lasting denunciation of war's brutality, urging empathy, peace, and dignity over militarism. Modern readers are encouraged to revisit it as a timeless reminder of the human cost of conflict.

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Ernest Hemingway is one of the most popular novelists in the history of American Fiction. He occupies a distinctive place among the modern novelists of world literature. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature for his mastery of the art of narrative in 1954. He wrote a number of novels and short stories. His novels and short stories seem to be only an exercise in action, and they appear to be something informative, but they reveal the deeper layers of meaning, association or impression. His novels relate directly to war and violence. American fiction was affected by the First World War. The war affected the lives of lives and works of American novelists like F. Scott, Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. In literature, Hemingway was aware of the undercurrent of war-horror of the two World Wars and the seeds of destruction and disintegration. His experiences of war gave a particular tone and colour to his writings. We notice a deep note of unease and instability. In his novels, he describes the destruction that is caused by the war. War does not merely mean physical destruction; it also its own spiritual, psychological or ethical implications. Hemingway is painfully conscious of the adverse effect of war on human psyche. The second aspect of the theme of his novels is love, peace and friendship. His novels may be described as the novels of quest and search for the finer values of life.

War Apathy in *A Farewell to Arms*—Like George Bernard Shaw, Ernest Hemingway is a man of world peace lover and has his hatred for war. As we study the history of literature, we find out an enormous amount of war disasters and fears which are immortalized in the plays, novels and poems and the best example is of the Homer's ancient Greek epic Iliad which deals with the Trojan War, probably the most famous ancient war over unfortunately a long and bloody history. The Trojan War has been fought for ten years and a lot of people have been killed in this war and Professor Vikas Sharma says, "If Helen left her husband sir Menelaus and eloped with Sir Paris of Troy, it was fated. The Trojans and Spartans fought a terrible battle for ten years. And finally, Helen had to return to her husband. Nothing new on earth—Pride, lechery, ego, passiveness, greed, anger, and gluttony are well known evils." (Sharma-09) George B. Shaw was against the war. He believed that the war was often fueled by the capitalist greed and nationalistic fervor; and leading to unnecessary bloodshed and sufferings. Sergius says to Raina: "I am no longer soldier. Soldiering, my dear madam, is the

coward's art of attacking mercilessly when you are strong, and keeping out of harm's way when you are weak. That is the whole secret of successful fighting. Get your enemy at a disadvantage; and never, on any account, fight him on equal terms." (Agarwal and Ravi-44) We see the impact of the two global wars on Hemingway's life and works. He was aware of the undercurrent of war-horror. His entire outlook on life was conditioned by war: In war, badly wounded, Hemingway had left its presence so close that nothing else afterwards could ever seem as real. He must push nearer and nearer to whatever truth its proximate held." (Cunliffe-284-85)

In the novel *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway wants to warn the people about worldwide of the dangers of war and those who feed on the blood of warring sides. Weapons suppliers always think of continue of the war so that their weapons demand. Weapons dealers become happy when a war erupts here and there in the world so that they would be prosperous and wealthy by supplying the dangerous arms to the war makers; but they forget about the deaths, bloodshed, sufferings, pains and fears. The manufactures of the weapons supply the terrifying arms to both fighting sides to each other and the result is destruction, death, ruins and all kinds of evil in the world in addition to the terrible consequences of wars such as chaos, kidnapping, stealing, rapes, robbery and displacement of the innocent people.

The novel '*A Farewell to Arms*' deals with Hemingway's personal experiences of the First World War and the theme of war enters in the novel through Henry. Henry is the protagonist of the novel. He is an American who has enrolled himself in the Italian Army that is fighting against the combined armies of Austria and Germany during the First World War. Henry is posted on the Italian-Austria border. Henry is a Lieutenant in the Italian Ambulance Corps. As we study the novel, we find that he is fond of food, fun, music and sex. He wants to visit brothels rather frequently. He has no faith in the religion. He does not take the life seriously. He is shocked to find that Italian army is in a state of utter disorder and confusion. He does not care very much for what is to happen later. He considers life to be only a game. He says:

That was a gain, like bridge, in which you said things instead of playing cards. Like bridge you have to pretend you were playing for money or

playing some stakes. Nobody mentioned what the stakes were. It was all right with me. (A Farewell to Arms 27)

A Farewell to Arms is a war novel about the First World War. It depicts the paradox of war itself. There is no hope and no future for Henry and Catherine. They become the victims of a cruel age. By fleeing the battlefield Henry makes a separate peace. He escapes with Catherine to Switzerland; but he cannot evade death completely. The novel ends with the death of Catherine in child-birth. Henry returns to the hotel in the rain. The rain is symbol of the disaster. The novel ends with tragedy. The irony of the situation is that he cannot really forget the war. Even though he is doing everything, he can forget it. The war is not over. Frederic thinks that he can escape. His sensibility suggests that he is only playing truant. He says: "The war was a long way away. May be there was not any war. There was no war here. Then I realized that it was over for me. But I did not have the feeling that it was really over. I had the feeling of a boy who thinks of what is happening at a certain hour at school-house from which he has played truant." (A Farewell to Arms-189-90)

Hemingway is lover of world peace. He is not in favour of war. He regards that due to war a lot of innocent people are killed and millions of people have to leave their homes. The children become orphans and the women have to lead their lives as the widows. A Farewell to Arms' presents a world in which destruction is the ruling motif. A harrowing description of death, destruction and despair covers the major portion of the novel. When Henry returns from his furlough, Rinaldi gives him the information: "Since you are going we have nothing but frostbites, chilblains, jaundice, gonorrhea, self-inflicted wounds, pneumonia and hard and soft chancres." (A Farewell to Arms-189-90). This is certainly a sad commentary on the ugly picture of the condition of war. This anti-war attitude is brought to our notice from the opening paragraph of the novel which hints at disintegrating and crumbling effect of the war. The novelist gives one example of the crushing effect of war on human beings. Catherine tells Frederic how she had lost to the war the man she was going to marry. She had been deeply wounded emotionally, and her sudden outburst cause Henry to think of her as "a little crazy". Catherine and the priest dislike the war. Passini is the friend of Frederic Henry who is also tired of the war and she says: "There is nothing as bad as war. We in the auto-ambulance

cannot even realize at all how bad it is.....” (A Farewell to Arms-43) But Henry does not share Passini’s view about the war, and he says: ‘Well, I knew I would not be killed. Not in this war. It did not have anything to do with me. It seemed no more dangerous to me myself than war in the movies.” (A Farewell to Arms-33) He does not see that as the game war is absurd. When he is hit by fragments of a trench motor shell, he finds that he is really in the war after all. He disgusts with the war manifests itself in hedonistic escapism in sleep. We see his apathy to the war in the following lines:

“I don’t believe in victory anymore.”

“I don’t believe in defeat. Though it may be better.’

What do you believe in?

In sleep’....” (A Farewell to Arms-104)

Treatment of Love in ‘A Farewell to Arms’-Like G. B. Shaw, Hemingway deals with the love story of Frederic Henry and Catherine. Henry is the protagonist in the novel he began to love Catherine. Catherine is the heroine of the novel. She is the nurse in the hospital. She is introduced to us in the novel as a nurse who works at hospital looking after the wounded soldiers in the war. Henry comes in the touch with her when he gets wounded in war. He has to remain in hospital for quite some time. At first, he feels disposed to look upon Catherine as an ordinary woman but leaps and bounds, he comes to realize that she is made of extraordinary stuff and there is something fascinating about her. She is not a garrulous woman. She does not speak much. She tries to get Henry initiated into a new phase in life. In the company of Catherine life opens up several opportunities to Henry. Frederic Henry returns to war when he covers his wounds but he gets disenchanted with war and its violence. When he finds that the enemy forces have penetrated deep into Italy, he seeks an escape from war to peace. It is a result of his realization that he eludes with Italian police net, he jumps into the river and he swims across to peace and freedom. He bids a farewell to arms, the world of war. The novelist says:

There is nothing as bad as war. We in the auto-ambulance cannot even realize at all how bad it is. When people realize how bad it is they cannot do anything to stop it because they go crazy. There are some people who

never realize. There are the people who are afraid of their officers. It is with them that war is made. (A Farewell to Arms-43)

The novel deals with the themes of war and love. The war theme is relegated to a subordinate place in the structure of the novel. But we see that love and war are interlinked from the beginning to the end of the novel by the novelist. The novel may be fairly described as one of the Great War and love stories of all time. The novelist combines realism and simple language to launch a diatribe against war and to tell a touching love story at the same time. It is story of love narrated against the background of the First World War. But the love story could not have taken the place without the background of the war. It, no doubt, will remain a great book of war and love. Brain Way says:

A Farewell to Arms deals with a love-affair conducted against the background of the war in Italy. Its excellence lies in the delicacy with which it conveys a sense of the impermanence of the best human beings, the unobtrusive force of its symbolism of mountain and plain; above all the vast scope of its vision of war—the retreat from Caporetto is one of the great war-sequences of literature. (Way-123)

The romance of Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley develops in war-affected atmosphere. The two themes of war and love are woven into a tragic pattern. The novel is a tragic story of love and war in five books. The war is dominant in the book I and III and love is covered in the second and forth books. The motive of war is forgotten. Henry tries to forget the war he has left behind.

Carlos Baker has analyzed the central theme of the novel ‘A farewell to Arms’ in the terms of the mountain and the plain. The mountains serve as a symbol of peace and quiet of love, dignity, health, happiness, good life and of worship. On contrast, the plains serve as a symbol of indignity, disease, suffering, nervousness, war and death. In the novel the rain is a symbol of disaster and in the first chapter rains brings cholera that kills seven thousand soldiers. Rain falls, when Henry parts with Catherine after his recovery at the Milan hospital. Catherine herself sees rain as ill omen and she says to Henry— “I am afraid of rain because sometime I see me dead in it.” She further says, “And sometimes I see you dead in it.” The second tragic event is happened that rain falls when Catherine is trying to have her baby in the Swiss Hospital. It is falling when she

dies and when Henry pushes the nurses out of the room. He wants to be alone with her. When Henry leaves hospital and he walks back to his hotel, it is raining. Rain has thus been as a symbol of misfortune.

‘A Farewell to Arms’ is a personal and autobiographical novel. In this novel Hemingway has drawn his experiences of the First World War, including his war-time affair with Agnes H von Kurowsky. His memories of the First World War prevail this novel. He was wounded in the legs by mortar fragments and heavy machine gun fire; and this experience he could not forget. He gave vent to his feelings and experiences in the novel. The traumatic wound was an unforgettable experience which the novelist recalled in ‘A farewell to Arms’. His love affair with an America Red Cross nurse in Milan was also an experience which he could never forget. This love-affair was passed into the novel ‘A Farewell to Arms’. The Frederic and Catherine relationship is based on Hemingway’s personal experience at the Military hospital in Milan where he was sent to recuperate after he was wounded at Fossalta di Paive in 1918. Hemingway’s second son was delivered by the caesarian operation; Patrick which Catherine underwent at the end of the book.

The novelist made the art out of his experiences of the wars of his life-time. War is his milieu. War, killing, brutality and violence are the main themes of his works. His tender mind was outraged by the brutality and violence which he witnessed on the battle-field and bull-ring. Violence has been a facet of American life as in most other countries in the world. He looked behind the civilized façade and found the violence. He honestly presumed the presence of violence in the world. He showed that war was monstrous and brought the death and diseases in its wake. He says:

“At the start of the winter came the permanent rain and with the rain came the cholera. But it was checked and in the end only seven thousand died of it in the army.” (A Farewell to Arms-8) he was disgusted with the war; he wrote in the preface to war-anthology, man at War: I have seen much war in my life-time and I hate profoundly.” (Man at War an Anthology-19) he made his disgust of war quite explicit in A Farewell to Arms. In it everybody is sick of the war. In the beginning of the novel Catherine appears to be crazy, because she lost her brothel in the war. Frederic Henry is too disillusioned about the war when he faces the

real danger. He is wounded in the battle-field. He deserts from the Italian army after caporetto. The captain Rinaldi is fed up with war and says:

“This war is killing me. I am very depressed by it.” (A Farewell to arms-130) Henry’s experiences of the brutalities of war in the retreat made him think of man’s struggle against the death. He was convinced that the world was an inhuman place dominated by sorrow and sadness. The ultimate death was inescapable and he says;

If you 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 everyone and afterwards 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 impartiality. If you are one of these, you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry. (A Farewell to arms-139)

The novel brings out nihilism of Frederic Henry who realizes that death frustrates all the ideals that are dear to man. Again he says:

Now Catherine would die. That was what you did. You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules that first time they caught you off base they killed you. Or they killed you. But they killed you in the end. You could not count on that. Stay around and they would kill you. (A Farewell to Arms-252)

Ernest Hemingway, no doubt, is one of the most progressive novelists of the modern era. He wants to tell us that human life is full of tensions and struggles. In this world everyone has to encounter death and destruction. It is the result that life seems to be helpless and meaningless affair. Man has to face challenges and sufferings of the life with courage.

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