

The Theme of Love Against the Background of War in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*

Dr Mayurkumar Mukundbhai Solanki

Assistant Professor of English

Growmore College of Engineering Himatnagar

Gujarat, India

mmsmodasa@yahoo.com

Abstract

Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* has autobiographical elements that reveal the author's life story. Lt. Frederic Henry, the narrator, tells the story of his love affair with Catherine Barkley, a nurse in the hospital. Being an eye witness and served as a soldier during World War I, Hemingway seems to favour humanity, love and peace in the novel. He considers the war as futile and venomous for mankind. Hemingway himself passed through upheavals of life but there was a little hope to get love in life. Love brings liveliness to man's life. Plato considered love as the solution to all the problems. This paper is a sincere effort to evaluate Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* as a tale of love against the background of the war.

Keywords: Love Affair, Peace, World War I, Humanity, Futile, Solution

Introduction

Ernest Hemingway, an American author, produced several masterpieces like *A Farewell To Arms*, *The Old man and the Sea*, and *The Sun Also Rises* and besides all these novels he wrote considerable short stories in the history of literature. Hemingway is known

for the presentation of the hurdles and struggle of human beings during the various facets of life. As Hemingway himself struggled a lot throughout his life, he knew the importance of love and peace in man's life. Hemingway's novels are a mixture of optimism and pessimism. Sometimes we believe that the theme of nothingness and man's helplessness against destiny runs in his many works. *The Old man and the Sea* is about man's helplessness against destiny. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway mourns over the lost generation but he hopes for a better future. On the contrary, *A Farewell to Arms* deals with the theme of the futility of war.

Love as a central theme of *A Farewell to Arms*

A Farewell to Arms published in 1929 that displays the Italian campaign of World War I. The novel is a love story between Frederick Henry, serving as a lieutenant in the ambulance corps of the Italian Army and Catherine Barkley, an English nurse. It is believed that the title *A Farewell to Arms* is taken from the 16th century poem of George Peele.

The novel is divided into five sections or books. Frederic Henry is the narrator in the novel. At the beginning of the novel, Hemingway talks about how a cholera epidemic kills thousands of soldiers. Hemingway presents the horrors of war through the characters of the soldiers. First Surgeon Rinaldi falls in love with Catherine Barkley but not so seriously. It is stated that Frederic is severely wounded in the knee on the Italian front so he is sent to the hospital where Henry falls in love with Catherine. Besides the horrors of war, we find a romantic notion of lovers in the following manners.

I looked into her eyes and put my arm around her as I had before and kissed her.

I kissed her hard and held her tight and tried to open her lips; they were closed tight..... (Hemingway,p.27)

Henry wants to escape from war and hopes for the betterment of the future. As he says,

I wished to God it was over though. Maybe it would finish this summer. Maybe the Austrians would crack. They had always cracked in other wars. I wanted to go to Austria without war. I wanted to go to the Black forest. I wanted to go to the Hurtz Mountains. (Hemingway,p.38)

Hemingway himself served as a soldier in the American army during World War I but he was aware of mass killing during the war and hated it for the same. Henry represents Hemingway himself in the novel.

Love is in the centre against the background of the war in the novel. Catherine considers Henry as religion and wants to enjoy his company. She says; "You are my religion. You are all I've got." (Shams, p.51) Henry dreams of a good life with Catherine. The relation between Henry and Catherine grow deeper so that they find it difficult to bear the pang of separation. Catherine has been working at a hospital away from Frederic who is engaged in his duties at the battlefield. The lives of both of them seem boring without love. Human beings need love and warmth to go ahead in life. It is commonly believed that love has the power to transform man's life and brings liveliness to the dead. Frederic Henry expresses his feelings for Catherine in the following manners:

We will go now this afternoon and see. And in the town, we have beautiful English girls. I am now in love with Miss Barkley. I will take you to call. I will probably marry Miss Barkley. (Hemingway,p.9)

The relation between Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley grow deeper so that they cannot bear the separation. Catherine has been working at a hospital and Frederic is engaged in his duties at the front. Hemingway presents the image of their feeling of happiness at their reunion.

"It was as though, think both Frederic and Catherine, we met again after each of us had been away on a long journey." (Shams,p.56) It seems that separation is unbearable for lovers.

Feeling of Distress and Despair

However, the feeling of distress and despair runs in the novel, love story remains at the centre of the novel. Hemingway emphasizes the emptiness of man's life through the tragic end of Catherine. As Henry Sighed:

I thought Catherine was dead. Her face was grey, part of it that I could see. Down below, under the light, the doctor was sewing up the long, force spread, thick edged wound. Another doctor in a mask handed the things. It looked like a drawing of the inquisition. I knew as I watched. I could have watched it all, but I was glad I hadn't. I do not think I could have watched them cut, but I watched the wound closed into a high welted ridge with quick skilful looking stitches like cobblers. (Shams,p.57)

Conclusion

At the end of the novel, Catherine Barkley is dead. Henry has lost her and the baby too. He has shut himself for some time in the room where Catherine is lying dead. Light and darkness do not make any difference to her. Every kind of persuasion, cruelty, coaxing is immaterial to her. Frederic is left with no choice but to leave her there and walk out of the room. 'The loved woman', says, Barker 'has become death in abstract unvital image of her living self, a marble memorial to all that has gone without hope of recovery.' (Shams, p.58) It seems that love never dies Catherine's death affects Henry but she lives in his memory forever. However, love transforms a man's life but only a lucky person gets true love in life. Hemingway has tried to display the power of love through the characters of Henry and Catherine. On the whole, *A Farewell to Arms* is a tale of love rather than war.

References

<https://libcom.org/files/farewelltoarms01hemi.pdf>

Ibid.9

Ibid.27

Ibid.31

Ibid.38

Shams, Ishteyaque, *The Novels of Ernest Hemingway: A Critical Study*. Atlantic Publisher and Distributors, New Delhi. 2002. p.42.

Ibid. 43

Ibid.44

Ibid.46

Ibid. 50

Ibid. 56

Ibid. 57

Ibid.58