



Research Paper

The Ambivalent Nature of Life in *A Farewell to Arms* – Part II

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ABSTRACT: The present article focuses on Books III, IV and V of Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899-1961) left traces in literature by his concerns to exhibit and highlight eternal human values such as love, nonviolence and peace. Moreover, his literary imagination succeeds in informing as well as transforming the society by implicitly revealing the complexity of human nature and the brutality of war. The central issues Hemingway touches upon in *A Farewell to Arms* are truly cosmopolitan and they set the norms to protect the humanity. Humaneness is the fundamental tool for achieving it.

KEYWORDS: Life, Love, Death, War

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I. INTRODUCTION

Book III focuses our attention on the harsh and brutal game of war as the beautiful and gentle game of love in Books One and Two is over. Both of the themes are constantly lurking in the background of each other. The abstract notion of war is more and more full of meaning but both Hemingway and his protagonist remain morally non-judgmental about that massacre. The author's objectivity is represented by emphasizing action rather than subjectively expressing his emotional or moral response as facts speak louder than feelings. This way, Hemingway subtly adjusts our moral principles and gives impetus to the driving forces that make the world go round. Hemingway's literary paths lead to personal insight and emotional resurrection.

The central points in Books IV and V are the reunion of Henry and Catherine Barkley and their passionate love sentenced to be fatal. The sequence of ominous signs and symbols serve as a catalyst for the minor mood prevailing the narrative before the novel's tragic end. This unforgettable story of love and pain dwells upon ephemeral happiness that comes and goes like rain. It is the world of war that can give you everything and take everything away from you depending on your destiny. The glimmer of hope that everyone can have their separate peace and return to normal at wartime dies along with Henry and Catherine's newborn child. Eventually, a man without a woman and the seclusion of their love is lost, without a path and a reason to live.

II. THE WORLD OF WAR

The somber mood of Chapter XXV has a powerful effect on the reader as it reiterates the opening of the novel. It is gloomy autumn and Lieutenant Henry is back to the front after the peaceful summer. The minor mood and the feeling of bareness are conveyed through the repetition of "bare" four times and the mention of "dead leaves" (p.173). The infertile images along with the rain and the mist are heralds of death and we can almost sense destruction and defeat. Another symbol is introduced – the river. The river itself is a path, a lifelong journey; it also denotes constant change as flowing water represents the flow of unpredictable life. One thing is for sure, Henry has changed and "It did not feel like homecoming" in Gorizia (p.173).

Rinaldi and Henry are reunited but this time they are more distant than ever. The first one who notices that Henry has matured is Rinaldi, who says, "You act like a married man" (p.177). Lieutenant Rinaldi has also found his way to get away from war, because as he observes, "This war is killing me" (p.177). While Henry's way to escape is his love for Catherine, Rinaldi escapes into work in the hospital, alcohol and sex. The theme of marriage also represents their difference of opinion. Rinaldi is a bit jealous and he sees himself as "the snake of reason" (p. 181) – a reference to the Bible where the serpent is the deceptive creature that offers the fruit of

knowledge to Eve. Henry's remark that "The apple was reason" (p.181) makes it clear that it is always a question of choice whether to choose the good or the evil. Obviously, man has chosen to live in a corrupt, violent and morally decayed world.

The dialogue between Lieutenant Henry and the priest that predominates Chapter XXVI demonstrates their stances on war providing glimmer of hope that "They will stop fighting." (p.188). The next chapter is marked by the entry of the Germans, which adds value to the narrative. The place is full of reminiscences of Henry's earlier war experience in the area. Shedding light on the offensive, the protagonist makes it clear that "the word Germans was something to be frightened of" (p.199). Our senses are engaged to perceive war as we can "see" the ruins left behind and we can "hear" the fired guns. The "words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice" (p.196) are empty, void of meaning. Hemingway attempted to write a new type of war novel with preference for the concrete over the abstract "Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates." (p.196). This paragraph reveals the author's credo and literary legacy – his succinct prose style is far more influential than complex, elaborate sentences.

The chapter is soaked with rain, and rain symbolism has been developed to a degree that the reader has a premonition of disaster. Although rain turns to snow one night, it quickly melts and the rainstorm is resumed. Pictures pass by and while true, pure love thrives on the backline, filthy love predominates on the frontline – "Everybody in the Second Army knows that matron." (p.201). The peace-love dichotomy in the safety of the American hospital in Milan is juxtaposed to the war-sex dichotomy on the battlefield.

Rain is once again the ambulance drivers' companion as they retreat from Caporetto and the reader witnesses the "wide slow-moving column" (p.207) of vehicles. The figures of the two sisters, introduced in the chapter, suggest, "A retreat was no place for two virgins." (p.210). We are transported in a situation in which everyone is vulnerable, especially girls without any experience. Two more figures – the Italian engineers-sergeants – turn out to be central for the narrative to come. Catherine Barkley appears in Henry's dream as he falls asleep in the ambulance reminding us of the continuum love-war-life-death. These are two parallel worlds – the peaceful world where love and life reign and the corrupt world reigned by war and death.

Chapter XXIX highlights two of the most significant and dramatic turning points. Two things happen for the first time – Henry fires his pistol and the idea of desertion emerges. Stuck in the mud – a metaphor of war – the only way to get out is to desert. Ironically, Lieutenant Henry shoots at the deserting Italian sergeant, a member of his own side, not an enemy. The first time the "pistol clicked empty" (p.218), the second time, when Bonello – Henry's companion – pulled the trigger, "the pistol did not fire" (p.218), which clearly shows how inexperienced in arms they are. Not fearing of what he is going to confess, Bonello sarcastically says "Bless me, father, I killed a sergeant" (p.222). Human life is not considered a value, human life is nothing. Another symbol reappears in the next chapter – the river. The river itself is a path, yet in the novel, it serves as the passage to freedom.

Chaos has overcome the beginning of the chapter as we see abandoned trucks and carts. The ambulance drivers Henry, Aymo, Piani and Bonello think they have no chance to survive as they spot German forces. Suddenly, Aymo is shot dead. Any war does not make any sense and the bullets are most probably fired by some incompetent Italian soldiers. The threat does not come from the enemy, this time it is from some compatriot. Chaos, rain and mud prevail the whole chapter as Italian battle police start shooting Italian officers just because they suspect them to be German. As Henry observes, "We are in more danger from Italians than from Germans." (p.229). The action is on the loose and suggests the climax of the novel – Henry's desertion. Moreover, when Henry's ambulance group breaks up, he no longer needs to be loyal. War is void of logic and makes people lose their common sense is the idea that lurks behind the chaotic scenes in Chapter XXX. The second naïve insinuation is that throwing away rifles equals peace. Declaring war seems to be as easy as declaring peace but the latter is still impossible to achieve. Frederic's quest for his personal freedom results in leaving to the current. At the start of the next chapter, you and we replace the first-person narrative. Thus, Hemingway implies that all of us can be recognized as Frederic Henry, looking for our own paths to independent peace and freedom. Our zest for justice is the core feature of human nature. This way, we are all Frederic Henry at a certain moment in our lives. Henry chooses the river as his way to freedom. Water primarily symbolizes fertility and purification, however, Hemingway decides it to be the protagonist's way to agony, death and Henry's life ruination. Not surprisingly, Frederic Henry boards a train loaded with guns after reaching the shore and crossing a plain.

Lying amidst cold guns, wet and hungry, Henry remembers Valentini and Catherine. Chapter XXXII bridges the two plot lines in the novel – before and after the desertion. "Anger was washed away in the river along with any obligation" (p.248), which frees the protagonist from feeling any duty, remorse or guilt. Henry's thoughts take him back to Rinaldi, Catherine and their future life together. The end of Book III is optimistic but leaves the character hungry in the dark dreaming of the many places where they would go. Chaos prevails Henry's thoughts.

The beginning of Book IV is so realistic that we can almost smell the aroma of coffee. The conversation between Tenente and the bartender reveals how decent and alienated from the topic of desertion common people are. The bartender, a stranger, welcomes warmly another stranger and worries about his telltale coat. The porter at the hospital and his wife also give Henry a warm welcome and tell him that Miss Barkley has gone to Stresa.

At the start of the next chapter, Henry boards the train to Stresa, the wetness outside and the rain force the minor mood. Despite feeling uncomfortable in civilian clothes, the protagonist makes it clear that the war is over for him. The catch phrase of that part of the novel “I had made a separate peace” (p.260) raises a number of questions. Is separate peace possible in the seclusion of the hotel room? Isn't separate peace elusive? Can one escape and make their separate peace without feeling a “truant”?

When Henry meets Catherine, happiness fills her eyes while Miss Ferguson admits he is no “cheerful sight” to her. Moreover, she looks upon him as a seducer, “a snake with an Italian uniform” (p.264). The ominous symbol of rain is Henry's companion all the time – during the ride to Stresa, when he gets off and all night at his hotel room, which casts a long shadow upon the couple. Pessimism overwhelms that part of the novel and the outcome of their reunion is predetermined. The passage that follows teaches cosmopolitan lessons and reveals the philosophy of life: “If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks every one and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially” (p.267). That powerful statement refers to all the twists we all experience in life. The wheel of fortune is a sequence of failures and successes. Thus, the complexity of the novel goes beyond the themes of love and war and reveals the philosophy of life. The most important thing is to be able to overcome the setbacks and hardships prepared for us by fate because this way failure is the stepping stone to success. It is a question of choice whether to rise or fall because life hurts. It is typical of Hemingway to make his characters suffer. His philosophy is that suffering is an indispensable part of living. The end of the novel reveals that the same masculine principle holds true when we are in love.

The lingering thought of escaping to neutral Switzerland lurks while Henry enjoys fishing with the barman. The conversation with the wise Count Greffi once again justifies Henry's act of desertion as the 94-year-old man calls war “stupid”. Furthermore, their talk reveals how deeply in love Henry is, how much he values Catherine. The collision guilt – love is in favor of the latter, self-conscious emotion that is openly admitted.

The key Chapter XXXVI is transitional in terms of the narrative and not surprisingly, the symbol of storm opens up a new dramatic phase. The ordinary decent man, the barman, is worried about the future of the couple because Henry is in danger to be arrested and helps them escape with his fishing boat. Not only is the rain their companion in terms of symbolism but also the way they flee this time is by a rowboat across a lake not a flowing river. While rivers represent constant changes, the lake denotes peace and tranquility. Yet, the storm, the untamed wind and the rain foreshadow the following events. The rainstorm serves to illuminate the characters' emotions and inner struggle to feel free, like the wind.

When the couple lands in Switzerland, they are overwhelmed with the feeling of joy and even the rain is cheerful. The ominous sign of the broken umbrella is left behind in the darkness of the night and the comic scene with the customs police and their arrest is another hint for the ambivalent nature of life. This way, Hemingway gives the reader a breath of fresh air and emotional respite after the avalanche of perils – the stormy weather, the exhausting rowing and the arrest by the customs police officers. The optimistic mood and the feeling of relief at the end of Book IV after Henry and Catherine's release by the police does not foreshadow the following tragic events. The solace of the chalet in the mountains and the snow all around bring thoughts of peace and idyll. On the writer's side, this storytelling strategy depicting the tranquility of the landscape, serves as a contrast to highlight the horrific effect at the end. Their isolation in the mountains in Book V, with the snow shows they have finally achieved their safety and momentary serenity. Yet, “the vines all dead for the winter” (p.310) and the biting frost evoke suspense and make the reader anticipate explosion of hazards. Henry admits, “The war seemed as far away as the football games of some one else's college.” (p.311) and it is the only mention of the ongoing conflict. That sudden mood change is in unison with the universe and its unpredictable course. Full of dreams about getting married as soon as the baby is born, Catherine and Henry spend their time idling around Montreux. The doctor's words about Catherine's narrow hips cast shadow upon their bright future and the reader almost feels the cold wind. Henry is restless and sleepless at night, thinking about his fellows. Although they are in the shelter of the chalet in the mountains and it is winter, their second romance is going to finish. The doom hints and symbols are unleashed. When Henry asks Catherine, “Do you want me to go away?”, she replies “No. I want you to stay.” (p.318) and these words are stronger than a marriage vow. The cold winter days pass by and in March, the snow is replaced by rain. Young Catherine is due in a month and the couple decide to go down in the town of Lousanne. Leaving their refuge in the mountains is another prophetic warning.

The final chapter is the logical predestined tragic end after the sequence of signs and symbols. The second climax of the novel, Catherine's protracted childbirth, the death of the baby and ultimately Catherine's death are all in line with the mood in the previous chapters. Catherine admits, "I'm not brave any more, darling. I'm all broken. They've broken me." (p.345), which reiterates Henry's thoughts. Although Henry and his beloved Catherine achieved their separate peace and ultimate happiness, these concepts are so elusive and fragile that one can easily lose them. Ironically, the umbilical cord is the divine lifeline that sustains life, whereas Hemingway has chosen it to be the reason for the baby's death. Again, the reason for Catherine's death, the multiple hemorrhages, is overloaded with symbolism. Blood stands for both life and death; it is also the powerful symbol of family relations while this time it is their end.

All alone in the rain, torn to pieces, Henry heads for the hotel, after having lost his personal war – for his love and happiness. It is where it all started and where it ends – reverberating the eternal circle of life.

III. CONCLUSION

Hemingway is the herald of humaneness who has skillfully provided the moral code of conduct we should live by. Living in unprecedented times is now, more than ever important to look back at human values. Hemingway succeeds in implicitly adjusting our conscience in a non-judgmental way. Fundamentally, the novelist's great literary legacy can be depicted with the iceberg metaphor – although important details are hidden below the surface, the rest of the story implies and reveals the unsaid. Thus, the reader's critical and analytical thinking is challenged beyond the limits of human mind triggering deep emotions and feelings. All in all, at the macro level, this is an allegorical book about finding your way in life, irrespective of whether or not it is beautiful and happy, in a world at wartime.

REFERENCES

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