

War, Nature, Domestic Life and Hemingway Hero in *A Farewell to Arms*

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Abstract:

Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* is a modernist work. Modernism views war as a new evil that disintegrates the human life and modernism also says that man cannot transcend his environment. And so environment is an evil that is hostile to man. Times are not conducive for family or domestic life. Hemingway had zest for life and he carried out many experiments in his personal life. He believed in physical life and took active part in fishing, boxing, bull-fighting, and war. Hemingway is a legendary figure both as a writer as a man. He believed in physical life and he believed in something palpable and tangible. When someone took his writing to him, he would say "*show me your wounds, your wounds will tell me whether you are fit to become a writer or not*". As a man, he was highly interested in bull-fighting, boxing and fishing which required great deal of physical strength and sound mind. Hemingway came to love life and detest death. In his novels like *A Farewell to Arms*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and *The Old man and the Sea*, he has created an exact replica of his personality in his hero. Hemingway himself was a great lover of life and his hero also shows the same zest for life. Not only that all modernist writers make a distinction between life and death and reflect on who rules over whom; whether life rules over death or death governs life. Like other modernists Hemingway creates his own ethical code for his hero and we see him living according to that code.

Key Words: Modernism, war, hostile nature of the nature, family life, survival, struggle, code hero, physical life, etc.

A Farewell to Arms is the direct result of his personal experience of war as an ambulance driver in the First World War. This experience gave him chance to look at death from close quarters. *A Farewell to Arms* is almost an eventless life of Frederic Henry on the front at the time of war. He falls in love with a woman and the war jeopardizes his personal life. So he runs away from war. He realizes that man cannot have personal or private life at the time of war. So he finally bids goodbye to war but even then he loses his pregnant wife. Losing his wife is not the only incident of his life, he loses almost everything. Because of war, he is away from home. He himself gets seriously wounded in war. And had there not been his beloved he wouldn't have recovered from the serious injury. Then the war comes between him and his love, and finally his wife passes away. Thus in the time of war, he loses something at every level. War gives him the chance to look at death and especially untimely death at close quarters. He learns that people die young in the war. They never get the chance to grow up and enjoy the basic emotions of life.

The normal perception about the war is that it is breeder of heroic action. But *A Farewell to Arms* tells us about the daily life of soldiers on the front. They merely vegetate. In the time of peace, the soldiers are busy satisfying the basic emotions and desires of life. But by the time they accustomed to this eventless life, war comes and disintegrates their peaceful life. So Frederic Henry has the nauseating feelings towards war and in his nausea he bids goodbye to war and runs away from the front.

Just like war, nature is also hostile to man. It is always raining in the novel. Because of this the soldiers have to change their plans continuously. Normally the 20th century novel depicts the life of man who is out of joint with god, nature, and environment. In epic, man was close to god and nature but the novel presents man after his fall from the Garden of Eden. The novel tells us that man is not in a fallen world, in a fallen state where he spends his life in search of something authentic. He spends his entire life and he finds something authentic at the end of life. In the present novel, Frederic Henry finds love. But the course of love is predictable because there is war and hostile nature. They will not allow Frederic Henry to take a sigh of relief. Although he has run away from the army, he will not be able to run too far.

Both, war and nature are after man. Both are against the private life of man. Man normally collects the inspiration for life from the external world. But there is no significant external reality. Man suffers from the loss of significant external reality. The war is there but the question is for whom there is war? Who wants war? The answer is, no one wants the war and still it is there. Same applies to nature that in some way it must serve the man. But it is not serving the man. In such a situation, man does not move towards some kind of meaningful end which makes his life tragic. When the priest visits Frederic, he feels hurt and says,

“But there is my country. It is understood that a man may love God. It is not a dirty joke.”

It implies that the World War I is an evidence that either God doesn't exist, or that God himself is evil. If man gets domesticated he might bring children into this world and would try to move towards a better meaningful future. But both war and nature show that times are not conducive for procreation and without procreation there cannot be any future for man. So when Frederic Henry's wife and child die on the operation table there is total silence and this silence speaks volumes about tragic future of man.

As regards Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, there is a dispute whether it is a tragedy or not. If the classical concept of tragedy is applied to this novel, then it is not tragedy because its lovers make no fatal error in judgement or deed, and suffer a catastrophe which is merely accidental. Thus Hemingway's lovers are not responsible for what happens to them, whereas moral responsible lies at the heart of tragedy. Hemingway departs from traditional notion that the hero may be flawed in knowledge or character but his downfall must derive from this flaw. As against this tragedy in *A Farewell to Arms* depends on Frederic Henry doing the one thing we most desire him to do and most respect him for doing- committing himself in love to Catherine Barkley. Thus in the novel, the hero acts not mistakenly but supremely well and suffers a doom which is not directly caused by his actions at all. In all this the belief that life is a tragedy, life itself becomes the backbone for a new literary structure. So although Hemingway departs from traditional notion of tragedy, his novel is a tragedy.

Hemingway creates tragic expectations in his readers from the outside. In the first two chapters referring to the war Hemingway suggests at once the bad world his people will have to confront i.e. the war continuously implies worsening of the fate of the character and the world. In the war Frederic Henry is blown up while eating cheese, a dead soldier bleeds all over him. He has to take part in the nightmarish Caporetto retreat Then Frederic is almost executed by his own army. His subordinates Passini and Aymo are killed unreasonably. Renaldi, his best friend, ends in a depression. Finally the war only manifests the general human condition implies “They” will get you in Switzerland as well as Italy.

Along with this, the premonition of disaster is also implicit in the novel's narrative structure. Book I tells us about Frederic's descent into the horrors of war. In Book II, his fate improves where his affair with Catherine progresses. In Book III, he returns to the front where everything is worse than before. In Book IV and early Book V, we see the lovers happy as they escaped to Switzerland. The way the interlude in Milan was cut short, to be followed by a change for the worse, so the interlude in Switzerland is abbreviated.

In order to make his people confronting the bad world and general decline in their happiness, Hemingway uses omens as the devices. The most famous omen is, of course, the rain which accompanies every disaster in the book. Along with this, there are other omens. They range from literary allusions to the real blood which drips on Frederic after he is wounded. Other omens prepare the readers for specific events i.e. the Carabinieri shooting every tenth man in an army which refused to fight or Frederic returns from the hospital to a unit far advanced into despair or the mess hall that was boisterous is now almost empty. Thus the gradual deterioration in situation of the characters and the world prepare us for worsening of the fate of pregnant Catherine that something untoward would happen to her.

The tragic expectations are raised throughout the novel by means of Frederic's meditations, the foreboding events and narrative structure and the unabashed use of omens. The critics do not speak positively about Catherine's death but it should be kept in mind that her dying is directly associated with the whole tragic pattern of fatigue and suffering, loneliness, defeat and doom of which the war is itself the broad social manifestation. And moreover, her death is appropriate in the sense that she is not destroyed through her

own actions or Frederic's, or even by the war, Catherine's fate is generalized. Hemingway insists on the tragedy of life itself, not merely the insanity of war.

Hemingway embodies his view of life in Catherine's death, this view is not tragic. How can a death so arbitrary, so accidental, produce a tragic effect? One point that should be remembered while answering this question is that Frederic and Catherine are not innocent like Romeo and Juliet or Willy Loman. They are mature people who take a conscious decision without any illusions regarding war and their general situation in it. Not only that, Frederic is a man who is at first suspicious, even cynical- the affair begins as a war time diversion, a game of seduction which Frederic likens to the game of chess and bridge- it is this Frederic who decides to love Catherine. Thus we sympathy with lovers who are fully aware of the dangers they court, yet choose to love anyway. So Frederic acts as a typical Hemingway hero who knows trouble lies ahead, and still falls in love.

The power of *A Farewell to Arms* derives from the tension between what we desire for the hero and what we know will be his fate. Hemingway establishes his fictional world as more or less what Frederic thinks it to be i.e. world which breaks and kills indiscriminately where nothing is sacred. Everything in the war justifies Frederic's most severe view of this world which is tragic if not nihilistic. All this make Frederic's values exemplary and his love for Catherine noble. Thus everything contributes to the form of tragedy which we must desire, inevitably ending in catastrophe, which we must always anticipate. So the underlying assumption of this tragedy is that enemy is not only within- it is also out there in the universe. It is this universe which is dark and destructive context for all that happens in *A Farewell to Arms*.

Hemingway's hero is born out of the basic disillusionment of the writer that Christianity and other ethical system have not been able to save mankind from World War I. So man must create his own code of conduct and live in the light of that code. The world war taught man to stand for himself. If we remember the three above mentioned works of Hemingway, we see that the idea of death permeates or lies behind all of the character's actions in Hemingway's novels. Since the death is an ultimate end of life, Hemingway character believes in living fully and enjoying his life. They believe in the gratification of sensual desire. Another modernist Henry James gives the same message (live fully) in his beautiful novel *The Ambassadors* Hemingway examines life in the backdrop of death. Not only that, his hero prefers to live in such a way that he can avoid death at all costs. His simple wish is that life must continue at any cost. Life is everything and death is nothing. To live for a longer period of time death should be confronted. So his hero is a soldier, bull-fighter, and fisherman. He may have fear of death but is not afraid to die.

Hemingway hero believes in living intensely that is sometimes he is in the direct presence of death. This brings out his most innate qualities and test his manhood. Santiago of *The Old man and the Sea*, is an ideal example of this. He goes without catching fish for eighty-four days. Initially the boy is with him but after forty days, he is all alone on the sea. Then he baits a big fish and he remains with baited fish for three days and three nights and as a lonely, solitary person he is not afraid of death. He shows the coolness, the grace and courage in his confrontation with the fish. Santiago, the protagonist of *The Old Man and the Sea*, expresses the life Hemingway witnessed and believed in when he remarks,

"Man can be destroyed but not defeated..."

"Life is not a war; it is a struggle because war ends but struggle never..."

Like the character of an autobiography, Hemingway believes in examined (tested) life. Hemingway seems to be saying that the man who never encounters death, who never faces any danger at all, this man has not yet been tested. We have an ideal example of this type in Francis Macomber who is a married man. His wife is interested in hunting but he is not interested in hunting because he is little timid. For a while his wife flirts with the guide so insulted Macomber gets ready for hunting. Then his wife stops flirting with the guide. Now courageous Macomber kills a lion and after that he dies in his second encounter with the beast. Since Macomber becomes brave for a very short period of time, the story is called *Short and Happy Life of Francis Macomber*. According to Hemingway the life you live courageously and consciously that life alone matters.

In his short story Hemingway floats the concept of Nada (Nothing) and thereby implies that we have to become something from nothing. Hemingway hero is often called a restless man. Like symbolists, he stays awake at night and sleeps during the day time. So far as this type of hero is concerned, he is a disciplined person. He rejects thing of abstract qualities like courage, loyalty, honesty, bravery. He prefers concrete things that one can feel, touch and see. He has innate faculty of self-discipline. Like other modernists Hemingway hero believes in being the master of the situation. This is an indication of Hemingway's modernism. Hemingway's hero is a person with some degree of skill. For example: Frederic Henry deserts the army and never gets caught. Santiago, the sailor, knows all techniques of catching fish and even then he fails to catch the fish for 84 days. Even then he does not lose confidence in himself. So this hero with a skill detests mediocrity. He has hatred for banality. This type of person shows intense loyalty for someone or a small group. Frederic remains loyal to Catherine Barkley and his platoon. Santiago, though dismissed as a person without luck, loves the young boy and likes the community of fishermen. The final conclusion is Hemingway is a man whose concepts are shaped by his view of death. He believes in doing something concrete before he dies.

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