

## FREDERICK HENRY A VICTIM OF WAR TRAUMA IN THE NOVEL A FAREWELL TO ARMS

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### Abstract

Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* is a war novel based on Hemingway's personal experiences of war depicting the traumatic experiences of his characters. The plot of the novel reveals the various horrifying events threatening his life. In *A Farewell to Arms*, the two themes of love and war run straight and parallel, and the writer has managed to fuse them perfectly. The horrors of war are contrasted with the wonders of love. The plot is structured around the war trauma of Frederic Henry and emotional volcano of Catherine and the pessimistic vision of Hemingway. Frederic suffers from alienation and according to Patrick Hogan "alienation is not itself an experience one chooses to have, it is, rather, an inability, as we shall see, frequently associated with emotional and mental disintegration" (88). Hogan further suggests that alienation is a kind of "cultural disintegration involving a sense of alienation from all cultures, being no longer at ease in any cultures, finding a home neither in indigenous tradition nor in Europeanization" (88). The main source of trauma of Frederic Henry is the tragic death of Catherine and her child and his alienation as he is left alone in the wide world. Henry who is a fun loving, carefree person has transformed into a neurotic just because of the hellish experience of his life and Catherine, an innocent girl suffers a lot in her.

**Keyword:** Love, loss, war, trauma, torture, pain, stress.

### Introduction

In 2005 for the first time on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Vietnam War, the American psychologists explored the causes of retardation of mind and anxiety disorder establishing relationship between war and mental health. War is very destructive as it disrupts and uproots families. The soldiers who participated in the war action were horrified to witness the piles of dead bodies; the images of wounds; shells; and the parts of the dead bodies that scattered in the fields go deep in the psyche of the soldiers. Marina Mackay in her book *The Theories of Trauma: The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the World War II* explores the psychological effects of war on people. She comments thus: "War takes a toll on mental health of soldiers; war is a hell...it has an impact on the people who take part that never heals"(10).

### Ernest Hemingway a traumatic figure:

Ernest Hemingway wrote the novel to depict the wounded psyche of the characters that participated in the war and endured fatal events and got badly victimized. The novel is a product of war memories and the horrifying experiences in the battlefield. The novel mainly depicts the complex trauma and psychological loss of the main protagonists, focusing on their lives both sociological and individual levels. Trauma theory is adopted as the most important and relevant approach to explore the wounded psyche of the characters. Since trauma and psychological loss in this novel are the major concerns, the paper also provides a careful survey of trauma theory, focusing on Freud and Caruth theory of trauma. It emphasizes how trauma theory works extremely well in exploring various protagonists' traumas and losses in Hemingway's novel. The history of war and battles across the world reveal the traumatic experiences depicted by the writers from time to time. The theory of trauma proposed by Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth is relied on to trace the psychological trajectories of two major characters in the novel Frederick Henry and Catherine Barkley. They involved in the struggle of life and death. Hemingway has depicted the traumatic experiences of Frederick Henry who is a war hero and is physical and mentally wounded self. Henry is a patient of posttraumatic stress disorder. Henry and Catherine are the victims of war trauma.

### War Trauma

War Trauma is a type of damage to the psyche and the most poignant concern was the identification of the phenomenon of post-traumatic stress disorder in war veterans. The harrowing scenes of irrational death, bloodshed destruction, and inhuman violence are the main causes of the war trauma. Trying to avoid thinking or talking about the traumatic event is another symptom of war trauma. Similarly, the psychic shocks and disillusionment incurred by the soldiers in the Great War motivated Freud to propound the theory of war trauma. Freud and Cathy Caruth observe that the characters who behave an abnormal manner display the symptoms of fear, and experience nightmarish scenes.

The theory of trauma became very popular after the World War I. Freud in his *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) discussed the term trauma. He further advocates the idea of "repetition compulsion". Freud in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* observes "the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will" (131). The experience that Freud will call "traumatic neurosis" emerges as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind. He used so called "talk therapy" as advocated in his psychoanalytic methodology to deal with his patients suffering from trauma.

### Fredrick Henry and his struggle with War memories

The novel also explores the cultural trends of the age revealing the collective consciousness of the society trapped in the war situation. The cultural values of the 1920s were subverted by death, trauma and fear and this subversion of values is the main focus of Hemingway. Ernest Hemingway wrote novels to depict the wounded psyche of the characters that participated in the war and endured fatal events and get badly victimized. Henry appears as a hero suffering from the dissociation of self; haunted by old memories day and night suffering from relentless mental tortures. In this paper, the main focus is to examine and investigate the wounded characters of *A Farewell to Arms* published in 1929 from psychological point of view. The researcher relies on David Laing's theory of the divided self-depicting the wounded psyche of two major characters Frederick Henry and Catherine Barkley. They are involved in the struggle of life and death. Hemingway has depicted the traumatic experiences of Frederick Henry who is a war hero and is physical and mentally wounded self. Henry is a patient of posttraumatic stress disorder. Frederic Henry is involved in the action of war; the destructive environments of war mutilate his body and confound his reason. His life is shattered and things around him that holds dear threaten him as the scenes of death and violence make him sick and despondent. The barbarism of war makes him pessimistic and nihilistic of life and God. Henry watches with despair and subsequent emotional withdrawal soldiers dying of cholera. He was shocked to see the degeneration of his friend Rinaldi and the killing of the officers by their own army men just to win medals. The struggles of Henry and Catherine Barkley are traced out to comprehend the neurotic experiences of both the characters. Frederic closely sees death and in the presence of death Henry says:

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain....They were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity....Abstract words such glory honor, courage or hollow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers the numbers of regiments and the dates. (191)

Hemingway builds the chaotic and destructive atmosphere using the images of wars, violence, maimed trunks, and dusty leaves, brown plain and bare mountains. The imagery of rain, winter and cholera and dead and brown leaves are used to symbolize the traumatic life of Frederick in the novel. Catherine is a very unlucky; she is a victim of trauma. She is all the time haunted by the tragic death of her fiancé and leads a lonely and dull life. She still memorizes her fiancé by bringing a stick. "What is the stick? I asked...It belonged to a boy who was killed last year" (18).

There is a systematic development of inner turmoil in the life of both the characters. In this paper; the images, perceptions and sensations experienced by them are investigated. Philip Young gives his "wound theory" to demonstrate the experiences of Henry in the World War I as it proved a turning point in his life. Young observes that Henry is a typical Hemingway "code hero" who is a nihilist and pessimist because the scenes of violence and bloodshed; betrayal of human nature and barbarity shattered his faith and individuality. Gerard and Halperin observe that the main focus of Hemingway in the novel is the loss of human dignity and the dissociation of self of Henry and Catherine. Higonnet also extends the analysis of the plot of *A Farewell to Arms* to the anxiety neurosis of the main characters. Henry was a participant and he had seen the real violence and barbarity in the front. Henry suffers emotional and psychological damage; with Catherine the dissociation of self is spontaneous. Ernest Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms* has been done from a psychiatric perspective and it is found that Henry and Catherine are disillusioned. Both the main characters of Hemingway experience anguish, loss of memory and stress as they fear death. The critics of Hemingway such as Baker observe that he himself suffered from stress disorder symptoms and he reflected the same symptoms in the characters of Jake Barnes and Henry. He had endured the severity of psychological damage and his characters also exhibit the same stress disorder. The first understanding of Henry is that life is a ceaseless flux of dissociated impression of past memories. Man is bound to experience pain and fear so long he remains alive. The narrative structure of *A Farewell to Arms* explores the wounding of the mind of Henry and Catherine. Henry, Rinaldi and Catherine are trapped in the war situation where death and fear of death are the existential realities. The characters in the novel are in a state of isolation, confusion and anxiety. Hemingway observes thus: "say outside of his dreams" (Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* 88).

The critics observe that the Post-Traumatic Disorder is a diagnosable mental disease that arises in individuals who fail to respond positively to a catastrophic event. Henry was injured by the shell while his comrades died on the spot. The patients of neurosis often experience anguish, stress, phobia, anxiety and high blood pressure. Frederic Henry is burdened with the events of trauma forcing him to resist the telling of his story since he is fear-ridden. Diana Price Hendl observes thus:

On the one hand, he feels acutely the need to tell about his horrific experiences of war; watching his comrades Passani and Aymo die, his own suffering and wounding, the shooting of the sergeant, his forced desertion, and Catherine's death. On the other hand, he feels the code of manliness that requires that he not be perceived as complaining or weeping. (Hendl 40).

H.K. Russell in his article "The Catharsis in *A Farewell to Arms*" published in *Modern Fiction Studies* opines that the plot of the novel is a presentation of "the world order on the basis of pity and fear of catharsis" (25). Henry challenges the world order and he suffers from the fear of death. It is pertinent to add that the novel *A Farewell to Arms* is a war novel dramatizing the barbarous brutality, violence and the dance of death. Malcolm Cowley (1944) in his article: "Hemingway and the Hero" published in *New Republic* observes that there are many autobiographical elements in the plot of *A Farewell to Arms*. Hemingway went to war after his graduation. He had witnessed the scenes of death and destruction as he describes to one of his friends after time in war: "There was one of those big noise you sometimes hear at the front, I died then. I felt my soul or something coming right out of my body"(23). Hemingway reports the death of one of his friends by the shells and he also got wounded. Henry is also wounded in the battlefield; he is shell shocked and the scene of shelling haunts him day and night. Similarly, Young observes that in response to the wounding of Hemingway creates a hero who is "a wounding man, wounding not only physically but as soon comes clear psychically as well" (41). Young talks of "grace under pressure...the control of honor and courage in a life of tension and pain"

(63). Young has combined the characters of Hemingway and the personal experiences of Hemingway into a code. Robert Stephens argues that “the real Hemingway at war was not so much an interpreter or even reporter of events and moods, but renderer of the sensations of war” (100). Hemingway was confronted with the problem to create a narrative structure depicting the confusion and traumatic wounds of Henry and Catherine in the novel. He wrote a letter to Scott. Fitzgerald observing that: “War groups the maximum material and speeds up the action and brings out all sorts of stuff that normally you have to wait a lifetime to get” (Baker 17). Hemingway in his book *Men at War* writes in his “Introduction” that “you are badly wounded the first time and you lose that illusion and you know it can happen to you” (xii). Hemingway speaks of the ugly truth of war and depicts the barbarous and cruel human nature. The scenes of violence, cruelty, lust, sexuality, degradation and selfishness dominate the plot. The plot depicts the modern life and the effects of war on the psyche of an individual. Henry thinks in reference to trauma he has experienced during war as he says: “I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards of Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it” (185). Paul Fussell in his book *The Great War and Modern Memory* asserts that World War I “detaches itself from its normal location in chronology and its accepted set of causes and effects to become Great in another sense; all encompassing, all pervading, both internal and external at once, the essential condition of consciousness” (321). In *A Farewell to Arms* also there is break of normalcy of cause and effect.

Judith Lewis Herman in her book *Trauma and Recovery* contends that “the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness” (1). She finds a dialectical relationship between the trauma and the desire to reconnect trauma and often trauma is enacted outside the bounds of normal human beings. Henry says, “I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious and sacrifice and the expression of vain” (184). Henry in this passage expresses his honest interpretation of the experiences of war and its effects on the life of human beings. Henry narrates the loneliness of his life and the fear of death that haunted him day and night in his room as he says:

That night a bat flew into the room through the open that led onto the balcony and through which we watched the night over the roofs of the town. It was dark in our room except for the small light of the night over the town and the bat was not frightened but haunted in the room as though he had been outside. (101)

Hemingway narrates the sense of fear and alienation of Henry in a lyrical style using the image of a bat and the darkness of night. The novel *A Farewell to Arms* is a classic tragic love story full of intensity of emotions and passions depicting the pessimistic and traumatic vision of life of Henry. He sees the world as his enemy. Arthur Waldhorn observes that Henry “will solve the problem of dealing with the world by taking refuge in individualism and isolated personal relationships and sensations” (123). The recurrent theme of the loss of innocence dominates the plot and the loss of Catherine is an important aspect of the personality of Miss. Catherine. She also believes that death is uncertain and is inevitable in human life. Judith Fetterley observes that Catherine is an ideal woman who is truly committed to Henry’s love; she dies because she is woman. She is surrounded by trauma as her daily duty is to look after the wounded soldiers. She is also a war victim like Brett Ashley. She tells him the story of the death of her fiancé making clear his loss is monumental in her life. Her conversation with Henry gives her an opportunity to express her wounded self for the first time: “There’s not really any war of that sort down here. They sent me the little stick. His mother sent it to me. They returned it with his things. Eight years we grew up together. I was a fool not to. I could not have given him that any way. But thought it would be bad for him” (16).

Herndl borrows this idea from Judith Butler based on the performance of the soldiers. Herndl argues that the “strategic silences” of Henry represent his resistance to reveal his mental turmoil to anyone. Trevor Dodman in his article “Going All to Pieces: *A Farewell to Arms*” argues that Henry “suffers from the compulsion to remember and retell of traumatic past from the standpoint of a survivor both unable and perhaps unwilling to put that very past into words; the novel stands as a record of his narrative collision with the violence of trauma” (249). Dodman further argues that Hemingway’s novel *A Farewell to Arms* is a classic example of the psychological trauma. The novel “must be considered in terms of depressive effects....From the very first page of the novel Frederick suffers from shell shock; his voice is always already the voice of a traumatized survivor of grievous wounds and losses” (Dodman 251). Alex Vernon published his article: “War, Gender, and Ernest Hemingway” addressing the social compulsions, loss of agency and resulting emasculation of Henry. He interprets of soldiers marching as though they were six months gone with child as an “expression of their experiencing the military and war as emasculating and thus feminizing insofar as the soldier’s losing agency” (Vernon 48). Vernon has reviewed the novel in detail and found that Hemingway has depicted the real war life of Henry who was sick of the action and was always under the stress to leave army. He got this opportunity in Caporetto retreat when he jumps into the river to save his life and eventually deserts army for the sake of his beloved Catherine Barkley who is in the family way of his child. Hemingway visualizes the scene of the retreat thus:

As we moved out through the town it was empty in the rain and the dark except for the columns of troops and guns that were going down the main street. There were many trucks, too, and some carts going on the other streets and converging on the main road. The troops, the motor trucks, the horse-drawn carts and the guns were in one wide slow-moving column. The truck ahead stopped. The whole column was stopped. It started again and we went a little farther, then stopped. (262)

Frederic Henry was shocked to see that the “battle police” had given orders to shoot officers who had abandoned their troops. They had charged such officers as the traitors of the army since they had retreated from the main posts bringing humiliation to the battalion. It was an act of treachery and the “police” took it very seriously. The sight of killing and shooting the young officers was appalling and he was also on the hit list. Hemingway reports the entire episode in a lyrical style depicting the barbarity of the battle police:

At the far end of the bridge there were officers and carabineer standing on both sides flashing lights. I saw them silhouetted against the sky-line. As we came close to them I saw one of the officer's points to a man in the column. A carabinieri went in after him and came out holding the man by the arm. He took him away from the road. We came almost opposite them. The officers were scrutinizing everyone in the column, sometimes speaking to each other, going forward to flash a light in someone's face. They took someone else out just before we camp opposite. I saw the man. He was a lieutenant colonel. I saw the stars in the box on his sleeve as they flashed a light on him. His hair was gray and he was short and fat. The carabineer pulled him in behind the line of officers. As we came opposite I saw one or two of them look at me. (301)

Hemingway depicts the sensational scene of survival of Henry and the depressing effects of this gruesome episode on his psyche. The scene of his survival is full of sensational effects as any delay on his part would have been his killing on the spot as he puts it "separate peace" could only have come in the war and out of the war. He deserts army because the oppressive working of the war machinery is putting heavy pressure on his psyche. He expresses his inner feelings thus: "Knotting my tie and looking in the glass I looked strange to myself in the civilian clothes. I must remember to buy some more shirts and socks"(229). Frederic searches for Catherine and goes to Stresa by the train thinking that "I was going to forget the war. I had made a separate peace"(217). Switzerland becomes a symbolic paradise for Frederic where he enjoys the fruits of love and bliss of life for a few days. Catherine is his dream girl and he is far away from the world of gun fires and rocket shells. Vernon argues that military service is a kind of entrapment as the forces are compelled to submission. He says:

If pregnancy and childbirth for women signify and embody their social bonds, military service signifies man's social bonds. Paradoxically, military service and especially for American men headed to the Great War serves as a liberation from domestic, economic and social obligations, and a reassertion of military autonomy, but also as the ultimate tie to society, one that demands the selfless sacrifice of the individual for society. (Vernon 49)

Herndl further observes that Henry is so much stressed that he is unable to find a voice to describe his anguish: "the stoicism that he embraces as an ideal and keeps him really being able to give voice to what he's thinking or feeling. He surrenders his own story to the inter-wined stories of medicine and masculinity"(46). Henry has seen death in the famous Caporetto retreat; the memory of this event of war goes down in the memory of Hemingway and haunted him day and night. Freud observes thus in this connection in his *Studies on Hysteria*:

Reminiscences that cause the hysterical suffering are historical in the sense that they link to actual traumas in the patient's life. The injured person's reaction to the trauma only exercises a completely cathartic effect if it is an adequate reaction and the past that continues to wound is the past originality found no outlet. (189)

The novel is about, Henry who is an autobiographical figure; his struggles and failures to find a relevant meaning of love and life. He confronts many violent events that lead to the deflation of self. He failed as all his dreams are shattered at the end of the novel leaving him alone and desperate in the territory of Switzerland. He takes a radical decision and deserts army for the sake of his pregnant beloved but her premature death in the hospital at the end of the novel brings chaos and darkness in his life. Catherine's tragic death leaves him in a precarious position as Earl Rovit puts "Frederic becomes somewhat "humanly alive" (105) indicating a sign of alienation and depression. Bloom argues: "the death of Catherine make Frederic rejects all kind of belief in anything, return to the detached he started out from" (17). Frederic broods over the futility of life and war. Hemingway depicts the inhuman, callous and brutal vision of the world through the life and experiences of Frederic in the novel. He explains the meaning of war by telling that, "there is a class that controls a country that is stupid and does not realize anything and never can. That is why, we have this war and also they make money out of it" (48). He argues that every tenth man "is then shot not as a punishment but as a warning to others" (46). The Italian police caught him and he was also about to be killed on the spot but his sense worked and he saved himself by jumping into the river in Tagliamento. Frederic expresses his plight thus: "I ducked down, pushed between two men, and ran for the river, my head down" (176). But he survived and when he comes to the shore he had a sigh of relief but this death-like experience haunted him day and night. Catherine's pregnancy, her longing to lead a happy domestic life, and the proposal of Henry for marriage could not soothe her. The patient of PTSD shows symptoms including flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety and uncontrollable dreams and fears. She is always mentally disturbed by the rain and she associates rain with death which is another sign of her traumatic mind. Catherine says: "I'm afraid of rain because sometimes I see me dead in it. And sometimes I see you dead in it" (131). 11 She suffers from hallucination as she sees Frederic dead in the rain. Caruth further observes that the return of the traumatizing event like awaking memory, is another a symptom of trauma. She says, "I am not aware, however, that patients suffering from traumatic neurosis are much occupied in their waking lives with memories of their accident"(Caruth65).The most effective image in the novel is of "Rain" as Catherine says: "I'm afraid of rain because sometimes I see me dead in it and sometimes I see dead in it" (131). Catherine has a fatal hemorrhage and she also dies leaving Henry all alone in the world.

Frederic narrates the episode of death and horror thus: "I would like to have had the uniform off although I did not care much about the outward forms. I had taken off the stars, but that was for convenience. It was no point of honor" (206). Frederic observes cruelty of war, death and wounded soldiers as he records: "that in the jolt of my head I heard somebody crying. I thought somebody was screaming. I heard the machine guns and rifles firing across the river"(51). Henry sees that "they were both smashed above the knee. One leg was gone and the other was held by tendons and part of trouser" (52). Robert Merrill asserts that "Frederic is disillusioned with society no less than with his family or religion. The order of society has been unmasked by the war society has conspired to make" (577).

## Conclusion

Hemingway depicts the mental pressures of the hero Frederic Henry who is a wounded character. He is an anti-hero as all the time he is under stress and fear of war as he says: "I went out swiftly, all of myself, and I knew I was dead and that it had all been a mistake to think you just died. Then I floated, and instead of going on I felt myself slide back. I breathed and I was back. The ground was torn up and in front of my head; there was splintered beam of beam of wood" (51). He lacks the strength of character; balance of mind and string vision of life. He is pessimistic and has nihilistic approach to life. At the end of the novel, he is shattered and psychologically battered. He strongly believes that there is no God and nature is cruel to him. He fails to comprehend the working of God and nature. He had living relations with Catherine and suffers because of his moral transgression. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth* Lady Macbeth suffers from psychological trauma as the guilt is heavy on her soul. Macbeth goes on committing murder after murder but there is no mental peace for him till he dies. So is the case of Catherine and Henry in the novel. The traumatic experiences of Frederic made him sick and despondent. He says: "One died without knowing what it was all about" (338). In this paper the traumatic experiences of Henry is investigated. Henry has to bear the terrible burden of psychological pain and death; he has no divine father who can bring order out of chaos and he is bound to suffer anxiety and depression. All is lost for him and the death of Catherine brings the wheel of sufferings to a full swing. For him, ripeness is all and he emerges as a tragic character of Shakespearean tragedy. Frederic's life is transformed as he understands the depth of human life. In the hospital, he says: "Human life is like a basketball, they told you the rules and the first time they caught you off abuse, they killed you or they killed you gratuitously like Aymo" (338).

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