

TRACING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAJECTORY OF CATHERINE BARKLEY IN THE NOVEL *A FAREWELL TO ARMS*

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Abstract

Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* presents two major characters Frederick Henry and Catherine Barkley involved in the struggle of life and death. Hemingway has depicted the traumatic experiences of Catherine Barkley who is a war heroine and is physical and mentally wounded self. She is a patient of posttraumatic stress disorder. She is involved in the action of war; the destructive environment of war mutilates her body and confounds her reason. Her life is shattered and things around her that holds dear threaten her as the scenes of death and violence make her sick and despondent. The barbarism of war makes her pessimistic and nihilistic of life and God.

Introduction

In recent years literary critics have adopted a psychological approach to analyze Hemingway's works from the point of view of recent trauma theories. Hemingway's characters suffered from severe complicated states of mind which lead to mental degradation and manic depression. Carl Eby's "*He Felt the Change So That It Hurt Him All Through: Sodomy and Transvestic Hallucination in Hemingway*", links gender to trauma theory in his essay on Hemingway's wound and hospitalization in Milan. John H. Harvey's "*Give Sorrow Words: Perspectives on Loss and Trauma*", Charles J. Nolan's "*A Little Crazy: Psychiatric Diagnoses of Three Hemingway Women Characters*", extensively deals with Catherine's criteria for depression and her mental instability, and Marc Seals' "*Trauma Theory and Hemingway's Lost Paris Manuscripts*", help as frame of reference to understand Hemingway's problems with psychic issues. Hemingway frequently suffered from bouts of depression and painfully recorded his traumatic experiences in *True at First Light*, *A Moveable Feast*, *Islands in the Stream* and *The Golden of Eden*. These studies give us broad and comprehensive details of the trauma of war experienced by the central characters of *A Farewell to Arms* and their inability to recover from mental anguish which left a deep scar on their psyche.

The Tragic journey of Catherine from normal human being to trauma victim

Catherine suffers from the physical and emotional trauma. She is all the time haunted by the tragic death of his fiancé and leads a lonely and dull life. Catherine is a caretaker as a nurse and she comes near Frederic when he is admitted in the hospital. Catherine and Frederic's relationship develops in the hospital for being a nurse Catherine is responsible for caring for injured men. Catherine is not interested to continue her love affair with Henry. Henry is also not serious about Catherine in the beginning as he shows his false sense of love and plays a courtship game:

I knew I did not love Catherine Barkley nor had any idea of loving her. This was a game like Bridge, in which you said things of playing cards. Like Bridge you had to pretend you were playing for money or playing for some stakes. Nobody had mentioned what the stakes were. It was all right with me. (28)

Frederic is essentially a rootless American fighting for the Italians. Catherine cannot reconcile to the loss of her fiancé's death in the war and she is always haunted by the war psychosis. Catherine experiences emotional trauma as she calls herself as "crazy." Henry is soon fed up with the sensual views of his friend Rinaldi and the ribaldry of the officer's mess and the mechanical love of the whores. He gets new awareness of love and life when he comes in contact with Catherine and feels guilty for being casual and careless in love. He feels "lonely and empty" without the presence of Catherine and realizes that he is in love with her. He is injured in the war and his knee is damaged; he is admitted in the hospital where he meets Catherine and this meeting results into the serious involvement of Frederic. He admits: "When I saw her I was in love with her. Everything turned over inside me" (87). All their differences disappear when both begin love each other. Catherine says that if she cuts her hair, they would be twins, one blonde and one dark: "Then we'd be alike oh, darling, I want you so much. I want to be you too" (285). Catherine has developed serious relationship with Frederic and like her fiancé he is also involved in the same action so she is all the time worried about him. Catherine is a sick and worried woman throughout her relationship with Frederic and often makes statements that are pessimistic expressing her inner turmoil. In fact, during Frederic's recuperation in Milan she herself is "Scotch and crazy" (126).

Catherine 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). She suffers from hallucination as she sees herself and Frederic dead in the rain. At the end of the novel, Frederic walks out of the hospital into the night and rain. Frederic discloses that: "Miss Barkley was quite tall. Was blonde and had a tawny skin and gray eyes. She was carrying, a thin rotten stick, like a toy-riding-crop, bound in leather" (18). Catherine always memorizes her fiancé by bringing a stick: "what is the stick? I asked...it belonged to a boy who was killed last year" Catherine replied" (18). Catherine has begun to exhibit signs of madness. She is angry, frustrated, and vengeful. She is mentally disturbed to the extent that she cuts her hair in desperation:

I was going to cut it off when he died... I wanted to do something for him. You see I didn't care about the other thing and he could have had anything he wanted if I would have known. I would have married him or anything. (29)

Catherine is a very sensitive young girl who has experienced the unforgettable tragedy of her lover. Catherine cannot reconcile to the loss of her fiancé's death in the war and she is always haunted by the war psychosis. She is tortured because of the haunting memories of her fiancé death. She does speak to Frederic about her psychological pain when she says: "I haven't been happy for a long time and when I met you perhaps I was nearly crazy. Perhaps I was crazy" (101). These words depict the pain she is feeling due to the haunting memories of the war. Her survival becomes difficult as all the time she keeps on reminding her dead fiancé. Caruth in her readings of Freud's text *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Moses and Monotheism* argues that "trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival" (99). What Freud encounters in these texts is that "traumatic neurosis is not the reaction to any horrible event but, rather, the peculiar and perplexing experience of survival" (Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 64). Her survival becomes difficult as all the time she keeps on reminding her dead fiancé. Henry and Frederic live together for four months. She says: "We have such a fine time. I don't take any interest in anything else anymore. I'm so very happy married to you" (154). The characters of Hemingway pass through many psychological trajectories such as anxiety, frustration, alienation, depression, broken relationship and fear of death. Catherine has all these symptoms. Frederic too is involved in a dangerous situation; death can come to him at anytime. He is sick, wounded and physically deformed by the war action. He is always haunted by the guns and shells of the rockets; he loves Catherine but has no time for her. Hemingway observes thus:

If people bring so much courage to this world, the world had to kill 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 good and the very gentle and the very brave impatiently face the ongoing situations. (258)

Frederic Henry is very fond of visiting new cities and the novel begins with his adventurous journeys of the famous cities of Italy such as Milan, Florence, Rome and Naples. The setting of the novel is in Italy and Henry is depicted as an American fighting in the Italian army as an ambulance driver. He is lustful and has no understanding of love. He seeks adventures with beautiful Italian girls but he doesn't visit the priest's home. Henry expresses his confession thus:

I had gone to no place where there are snows roads were frozen and hard as iron, where it was clear cold and dry and the snow was dry and powdery and hare-tickets in the snow and the peasants off their hats and called you Lord and there was good hunting. I had gone to no such place but to the smoke of cafes and nights when the room whirled and you needed to look at the wall to make it stop, nights in bed, drunk. (14)

Hemingway has developed the love relationship of Catherine and Frederic in the novel. She is aware of Henry's initial feelings for her and knows that it's only a "rotten game" (27). But she continues her relationship with Fredrick in order to escape her alienation and old memories. She sees him involved in the same violence and game of killing in the front. This consciousness makes her sick and traumatic because she doesn't want to lose him. 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).

Wilson asserts Henry and Catherine love affair is "merely idealized relationship, the abstractions of a lyric emotion" (218). She suffers from physical debility. She is a New Woman and flouts all the norms of the society to enjoy the sexual liberty. When Henry proposes her for marriage, she rejects the proposal. Actually her fear of losing him again and resists her from marrying. Fear is the main element of trauma as fear defines a new type of subjectivity for a self which loses its foundations and becomes diffuse. Freud in his article "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety" has discussed the behavior of the soldiers traumatized by the shock of direct participation in the war.

Catherine tells Frederic how "Life isn't hard to manage when you have nothing to lose" as she dies at the end of the novel simply because she is a victim of moral transgression (49). She scrapped the institution of marriage and started developing living relationship with Henry who is not her legal husband since she never married him. Catherine is a beautiful British nurse, cool and dedicated, soft and innocent who denies traditional and orthodox concepts of religion and marriage. She is a New Woman of England, the product of the new culture of feminism. She believes in freedom and wants to enjoy love and sexuality. She has no religion she tells Henry that love is my religion:

Couldn't we be married privately some way? Then if anything happened to me or if you had a child."

That was for luck. Someone gave it to me.

Then nothing worries you?

Only being sent away from you. You're all I've got. (136)

This emotional and honest conversation of Catherine describes her innocence and her deep faith in love of Henry. At the Swiss Hospital, the child is found dead. He prays, "Oh God! Please, please, please, dear God, don't let her die" (341). He even wanted to stay with the dead body of Catherine but later thought it was no use and says, "It was like saying good-bye to a statue" (343). Her death is a terrible event that he has to undergo with. This finally lets him remain in an uncertain and chaotic position. Her death at the end of the novel made Henry see that everything in the universe is vain and empty. She dies when it is raining outside; in *The*

Waste Land of T.S. Eliot rain is a symbol of life and survival but in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* rain symbolizes death and loss of love and life. Scott Donaldson comments thus:

In this novel she emerges as the truly heroic figure of the book. Her willingness to submerge herself in a personal relationship, far from being a sign of female spinelessness, is an act of will. A model of courage and stoic self awareness, Catherine is determined to forge a meaningful and orderly existence if only temporarily in a world in which all traditional notions of meaning and order has been shattered. (97)

Ray B. West observes that "it takes Catherine's death to teach Fredric Henry what she had known from the beginning that death is the end of it"(28). Freud is considered as the key critic in studies of hysteria. He has explored the nature of hysteria suffered by the soldiers during war. He published an article "Thoughts on War and Death" in which he investigated the issues relating to the psychic depression and dissociation of self. Banfield in his book *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* asserts that "Freud often implicitly relates his patient's symptoms to the larger cultural thinking that these general essays reveal" (28). Shay in his book *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing Character* observes that soldiers in war behave like mad barbarians. Shay observes that "The individual feels beastlike, Godlike, socially disconnected, insatiable, devoid of fear, frenzied and cold in the war" (82). Dr. Ernest Simmel opines that "the most frequent war psycho-neurotic symptoms represent what after all is comprehensible without anything further, loss of memory. It may extend over a limited period of the war or over the whole of it or even into pre-war times. The whole memory is blotted out in order that definite things should not be brought to mind" (Simmel 40). Diane Price Herndl observes thus:

Plenty of critics have diagnosed Catherine Barkley as insane, unbalanced, or crazy. But critics almost always assume that Frederic Henry's malady is purely physical, he is the victim of shelling, in other words, but not shell shock....I don't want to diagnose Frederick as insane but I do not want to cast some doubt on the precise nature of his malady, and raise the possibility that his illness is actually masculinity as it was presented to the World War I soldier. (39)

Conclusion

Catherine is benighted creature groping her misguided way about a world that she has benighted and she is the victim of the war machine that mercilessly tramples her identity. Hemingway attacks the very understandable but nonetheless unacceptable response of being so over-whelmed by life's pain, dangers, and problems as to retreat into private escapes. Hemingway's hope for confidence in man raises questions of moral responsibility and free will set against a background of destruction and war. Catherine fails to see or attempt to flee from responsibility become negative models from whom we can learn the ways of refashioning our own lives carefully. Hemingway's works suggests that man can do something about the condition and quality of human life on earth.

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