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## ANALYSIS OF HEMINGWAY'S NOVEL A FAREWELL TO ARMS

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### Abstract:

Hemingway provided a realistic and romanticized account of war. He wanted readers to experience the events of the novel as though they were actually witnessing them. Using a simple writing style and plain language, he omitted inessential adjectives and adverbs, rendering the violence of the Italian front in sparing prose. To give readers a sense of immediacy, Hemingway used short declarative clauses and made frequent use of the conjunction. This dichotomy corresponds to the contrapuntal theme which is central to Hemingway's narrative work - the human drama versus the everlasting earth, chorological time counterpointed by geological time. The abiding earth, against the background of which all human effort is ineffectual, demands a tight-lipped, well-honed masculine prose, while the human drama requires an evocative, romantic, tender prose to express its poignancy.

**Keywords:** Contrapuntal, Heroism, Reward, Warfare, Wounded and Inhuman

Hemingway's 'A Farewell to Arms' was one of the most widely read war novels of the 20th century. It was published during the period between World War I and World War II, a time when war novels were very popular in the United States and around the world. War had a tremendous influence upon Hemingway. The Years spent in war had a profound effect on him and afterwards his relationship to people, life and nature was coloured by this. War, from times immemorial, has been regarded as an avenue where an individual can demonstrate and put to test his courage and heroism. It was with these romantic notions of individual courage, honour and heroism that young men enlisted to participate in the First World War. But their disillusionment was inevitable because modern warfare is certainly not an arena where one can accomplish heroic feats. Hemingway himself participated in the First World War as a Red Cross Ambulance driver in the Italian army and was severely wounded while distributing supplies to the soldiers at the front. The reward he obtained for serving in the war was a badly fractured knee on which he was operated several times afterwards also.

Commenting on this experience years later in Men at War, Hemingway wrote: "When you go to war as a boy you have a great illusion of immortality. Other people get killed; not you. . . . Then when you are badly wounded the first time you lose that illusion and you know it can happen to you. After being severely wounded

two weeks before my nineteenth birthday I had a bad time until I figured out that nothing could happen to me that had not happened to all men before me. Whatever I had to do men had always done. If they had done it then I could do it too and the best thing was not to worry about it."

Later he described this war as "the most colossal, murderous, mismanaged butchery that has ever taken place on earth." <sup>1</sup> Frustrated with the ways of organized society, he broke away from it and sought a "separate peace" for himself. But he could not stay away long from organized life, for "No man is an island, entire of himself," as he himself says quoting John Donne.

With the civil War breaking out in Spain, Hemingway returned again to society, fighting for the cause of the Republicans against the Fascists. In his play *The Fifth Column*, he makes the point that man cannot live away from society; he has to live in it with all its steaminess and face to face with its brutalities. It was the First World War that had a most terrible and life-long impact on Hemingway. His works that came out of this influence are unmatched as in them "... Hemingway more than any other writer defined war and one's place, or lack of place, in it. It is Hemingway's hatred for war that forms an important aspect of his fiction. The war had such a pronounced effect on his mind that even when it is not being dealt with directly, its shadow is always lurking in the background. War in the epic sense appealed to Hemingway as an opportunity to bring out the best in man, but his own experience of war soured him considerably. He, therefore, portrays modern warfare as an inhuman game, the whole operation tantamounting to nothing but cold-blooded murder. The Hemingway protagonist goes to war with romantic notions and comes back a totally disenchanted man, shaken by the spectacle of senseless and brutal human slaughter. After his experience on the battlefield, the Hemingway protagonist perceives to his utter horror and dismay, the shallowness of the war slogans. He encounters abnormal and inhuman conditions on the battlefield and the horror brings about a kind of numbness, which leads to a state of callousness. The Hemingway protagonist is alienated because of his experience in the war, resulting in a moral and spiritual vacuum. He then tries to find some meaning in life, some order in the world. It is to overcome the terror and tragedy of war that Hemingway evolved a code, which is expressed in his style.

Hemingway's truthful and objective rendition of experience made him cultivate a style shorn of ornament and unnecessary detail. His style is marked by terseness, simplicity, coolness and conciseness; it is free from critical jargon. Hemingway's early work as a newspaperman and foreign correspondent helped to prune his style. His use of declarative sentences and his scrupulous avoidance of hackneyed adjectives and literary flourishes could be traced back to his training in the office of the *Kansas City 'Star'*. Disciplined prose and objectivity were what Hemingway's Kansas experience taught him. Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound also had an immense influence on Hemingway in the evolution of his style. Pound impressed upon the need of concision, or saying what had to be said in the fewest and clearest words. The development and perfection of his style was a continuous progress. Therefore, it is not right to say, as Philip Young does, that the style was developed and perfected in the same period when the author was reorganizing his personality after his terrible

experience in Italy. His trauma of 1918 certainly played an important part in his apprenticeship. He thought deeply about the problem of depiction and made sincere efforts to cut out the unnecessary details and sentiments clouding the essentials that made the emotion. It was a drive towards a masculinity and simplicity unknown in literary writing.

On the surface, Hemingway's style, like any other good narrative style, is characterized by concreteness, economy and speed. But a deeper investigation reveals two styles - one evocative, lyrical and tender, and the other depictive and hard-boiled. Hemingway provided a realistic and romanticized account of war. He wanted readers to experience the events of the novel as though they were actually witnessing them. Using a simple writing style and plain language, he omitted inessential adjectives and adverbs, rendering the violence of the Italian front in sparing prose. To give readers a sense of immediacy, Hemingway used short declarative clauses and made frequent use of the conjunction. This dichotomy corresponds to the contrapuntal theme which is central to Hemingway's narrative work - the human drama versus the everlasting earth, chorological time counterpointed by geological time. The abiding earth, against the background of which all human effort is ineffectual, demands a tight-lipped, well-honed masculine prose, while the human drama requires an evocative, romantic, tender prose to express its poignancy.

Hemingway belongs to the stylistic tradition of simplicity. He adheres to concrete words, unencumbered by decorative adjectives and figures of speech. The following passage from *A Farewell to Arms*, in which a highly dramatic situation is presented, proves this: The nurse opened the door and motioned with her finger for me to come. I followed her into the room. Catherine did not look up when I came in. I went over to the side of the bed. The doctor was standing by the bed on the opposite side. Catherine looked at me and smiled. I bent down over the bed and started to cry.

There is no effort to introduce emotion but only a bare picture of what happened. Hemingway has used simple words and declarative simple sentences. Out of a total of seven sentences, there is only one complex sentence; there are two pure simple sentences and the rest are compound sentences each containing two simple sentences joined by "and".

Hemingway's economy of expression enables him to keep out all feelings and thoughts which may come in the way of the true emotion a given situation generates. To this end, he whittles down his language to the barest necessary minimum until it takes the form of significant understatement. Another interpretation of the novel's title stresses the dual meaning of the word arms. In deserting the Italian army, the protagonist bids farewell to "arms" as weapons. When Catherine dies, he bids farewell to the loving "arms" of his mistress. This interpretation of the title blends the two major themes of the novel: war and love. *A Farewell to Arms* more than justified the early enthusiasm of the connoisseurs for Hemingway, and extended his reputation from them to the public at large.

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