

ENGLISH: *A FAREWELL TO ARMS*

To what extent are Catherine and Frederic victims of war?

Published in 1929, Ernest Hemingway's modernist anti-war novel, *A Farewell to Arms*, acts as his semi-autobiographical conduit in expressing his views and experiences on the horrific nature of war. Hemingway utilises two characters to aid in this: Frederic Henry, a misogynistic, cynical American volunteer, and Catherine Barkley, an English V.A.D.. Through these characters, Hemingway expresses the extent to how much victims of war must go through – using methods of escapism and 'love' – in order to survive and escape it.

War is a terrible force, and with it, brings pain and sorrow to all involved in it. For Frederic Henry, this was undoubtedly no exception. It is part of the human condition to survive, and often, methods of escapism must be used to distract oneself from the horrors of war. Frederic at first appears to distance himself from the war, believing he would not die, or become injured, as he was not involved, however this illusion is shattered completely when he was bombed "while ... eating cheese". Perhaps more prominent methods Frederic employed was alcoholism, the constant trips to the whorehouse, and the hedonistic sexual relationship he shared with Catherine. 'Drowning in his sorrows' through alcohol was especially evident through Hemingway's literary technique, 'the state of consciousness principle'. This technique was first coined by a psychologist, then picked up by modernist writer, James Joyce, and involved a continuous flow of thoughts, emotions and experiences that often have no real connection. These hedonistic methods of escapism clearly demonstrate the extent to how Frederic is a victim of war, and his futile attempts to distract himself, and escape from it.

With war, comes countless horrors and deaths. Hemingway's negative views on war is juxtaposed with the nihilistic nature of war, together, making it clear to the readership that war is a terrible thing. The tragedies and horrific events of war are often combined with the symbol rain to showcase a foreboding situation. In the opening scene of *A Farewell to Arms*, rain accompanies the statement of "only seven thousand" died of cholera, giving it a grim and sombre undertone. It also closely follows tragedies involving Catherine and Frederic. Catherine once mentions that she dreamed she died during the rain and in the denouement of the novel, her dream becomes reality. In both scenes, rain symbolically accompanies these saddening events, highlighting the cruel nature of life. Another symbol used was the river Frederic finds himself in when he manages to escape from his captors. This river acts as a 'baptism' for him – it "washes away" any obligations he had of the war, allowing him to become 'free' and live a somewhat 'married' life with Catherine.

Love was perhaps the strongest and most prominent method of escapism utilised. When Catherine and Frederic first meet, it was clear that although they found each other to be highly attractive, they were not looking for love – merely a distraction. Calling it a "rotten game", the two delve into the relationship to escape the horrors of war surrounding them. However, during this process, it appears that the two genuinely fell in love. The capricious nature of their relationship is shown to have evolved when Frederic mentions how he loved being inside her hair, as it felt like he was being "enveloped in a falls or the inside of a tent". This level of trust and comfort clearly demonstrates how their fictitious love, stemming from merely a tool to escape the realities of war, grew into a more heartfelt and genuine love – allowing themselves to leave behind the war, and not become victims of it anymore.

Catherine and Frederic were both victims of war. Hemingway utilised various techniques to highlight this, through his detailed depiction of Frederic having to cope through a detached nature and the methods of escapism – alcoholism and sex, highlighted through the 'stream of consciousness' technique – he was forced to utilise in order to cope. The nihilistic nature of war was also showcased through symbolic imagery of rain, expressed with the deaths of thousands, as well as the foreboding nature of Catherine's death. Frederic being 'cleansed' through the river also acts as

a symbol – this however, not to exemplify the cold nature of war, but his attempt to leave it all behind, and to concentrate on his budding romance with Catherine. Their love, although purely a “game” at first, used as a method of escapism, eventually grew to become a ‘real’, loving relationship. All these techniques Hemingway employed highlighted the horrific nature of war, and demonstrated the extent to how both Catherine Frederic, as victims, had to suffer throughout war.