

THE ROLE OF GENDER AND WARFARE IN THE FICTION OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY

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ABSTRACT

There are a number of novelists reached a distinguished level in their literary career during and after the 20th century. Hemingway is the most influential novelist who climbed the ladder of fame and reputation without question. The aim of this article is to investigate the concept of gender and war in Hemingway's novels. It is a thematic analytical study which attempts to identify essential features of the writer's literary activity and to explain why the above coupled with the essential messages on the concept of gender and war, which are portrayed in his novels, is some of the reason why his works have been rendered classics of the American Literature. To investigate the different aspects of narrative structure and character portrayal exemplified by the Hemingway's novels: A Farewell to Arms, For Whom the Bell Tolls, The Sun Also Rises, The Old Man and The Sea, Across the River and Into the Trees, and--. To investigate the thematic representation of gender and war in Hemingway's novels from the theoretical study and analyses of his works the research concludes that Hemingway is a distinguished writer whose narrative structure, character representation and writing style are uniquely bound by the given concept.

KEYWORDS: *War's Impact, Gender Troubles and Hemingway*

Article History

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INTRODUCTION

Ernest Hemingway is one of the most celebrated and most controversial of American writers. He is seen variously as a sensitive and dedicated artist and as a hedonistic adventure, as a literary poseur and as the stylistic genius of the century. His personal life has become so involved with his work that the two are virtually inseparable in scholarly inquiry: critics persist, with some justification in reading characters in his works as "real" people and in assuming that events and attitudes in the fiction directly correspond with those in Hemingway's personal life. Hemingway was a strong man of definite opinion, who lived a vigorous life devoted to the artistic creation and to active participation in the world. As Carlos Baker has said in *Ernest Hemingway: A life story*, the standard biography, at an early age Hemingway developed the "willed determination to be a free soul untapped by tradition, living his life in accordance with pragmatic principles".

BODY OF THE PAPER

Hemingway came of the age during a sexual revolution. The early twentieth century was a time when "the dominant conservative Victorian Sexual definition and codes no longer made sense to many people, and new forms of consciousness and identity developed". Like many writers of his generation, he was fascinated by this new sexual terrain and the theories developed to establish and explain it. One must first remember that this was also a time of gender

revolution. Women were no longer seen as passionless or helpless and were asserting their independence and right to smoke, drink, get an education, hold important jobs, and even, in some cases, engage in premarital sex. It was also a time of changing gender identities for white middle-class men like Hemingway, as the idea of self-restrained moral manliness was replaced by that of aggressive, overtly sexualized masculinity.

In *The Garden Of Eden*, Hemingway wrote his own story of complex gender and sexual preferences involving one man and two women, and an overlapping subplot involving one woman and two men. We can also see Hemingway's resistance to social hygiene morality in *A Farewell to Arms*, where his protagonist Frederic Henry finds pleasure with prostitutes, despite contracting gonorrhoea, where a field brothel is an accepted staple of his regiment's camp. In *The Garden of Eden* Catherine Bourne asks her husband, David, "Is it true that Somalia women have ways of holding a man so he can never leave them? She answers her own questions by trying to tan" so dark [that David] won't be able to stand it".

Indeed, the women with a healthy sexual appetite have a prominent place throughout Hemingway's work. Brett Ashley of *The Sun Also Rises* is a New Woman who engages in sex simply because "it's the way she's made". Others who enjoy sex—most of them outside the bonds of legal marriage—include Catherine Barkley of *A Farewell to Arms*, Maria of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Marie Morgan of *To Have and Have Not*, Renata of *Across the River and Into the Trees* and Catherine Bourne and Marita of *The Garden of Eden*. Not only do many of Hemingway's female characters find sex pleasurable, but they are also sexually adventurous. To have sex with the wounded Frederic Henry, Catherine must assume the position on top; when Maria and Robert Jordan make love, they experience simultaneous orgasm so strong the earth moves for both; Marie in *To Have and Have Not* finds the disability of her husband Harry sexually exciting; and Catherine Bourne initiates "devil" transformations that involve not only gender switching but sodomy.

Hemingway's couple thus operates on the presumption of mutual sexual pleasure, which was the foundation of companionate marriage and also many sexual encounters outside of marriage, given the modern view that women's sexual pleasure was just as important as men's. In "*Hills Like White Elephants*" a young man encourages his pregnant female partner to get an abortion. In "*Cat in the Rain*", the troubled marriage is revealed not only through the American woman's expressions of unhappiness and lack but also by the fact that the bed has become a place for her husband to read rather than a site of mutual pleasure. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes' particular kind of impotence poses an impossible obstacle as he is able to feel sexual desire but not act on it.

Homosexuality was also a frequent subject in Hemingway's writing. In *Farewell*, Catherine recognizes that her friend Helen Ferguson is in love with her and "wants" what Frederic wants from her. Similarly, Pilar tells Maria that even though she is not lesbian, she wants Maria but does not "make perversion". Finally, after sleeping with Maria, Catherine tells David, "It was what I wanted to do all my life and now I've done it and I loved it".

Ernest Hemingway had many women in his life, from his days as a child growing up in a household of women through his four marriages. He also lived during a time of changing sexual politics and exceptions for women's roles at home and in the marketplace, so it is not surprising that the women in his fiction reflect not only his personal experiences with women but also the new politics and social contexts that reshaped the way women viewed themselves and the opportunities available to them.

The world of women as Hemingway first knew it revolved around his mother and the home. The mother that we find in his fiction is presented as a champion of God and the Protestant work ethic. Hemingway's repayment to his

mother appeared a few years later in his first collection of stories, *In Our Times*, some of which features a pious, controlling mother. In a later story, "Now I Lay Me", Nick Adams remembers his mother burning specimens and arrowheads his father had collected: artifacts from a more primitive world that she does not respect. But when America entered the World War I, now opportunities opened up for women. One of the women was Agnes Von Kurowsky, Hemingway's first love. Once the war broke out in 1914, she applied to Bellevue Hospital's nursing program in New York. She later noted, " [her] taste ran to something more exciting", than her previous job as a library catalogue. In July 1918, she arrived in Milan, Italy at the American Red Cross Hospital, where less than a week later, a wounded Hemingway arrived. They fell in love, though she was seven years older than he. For him, she fulfilled the fantasy, common in many male patients, of the attractive nurse as both lover and mother. After Hemingway returned home, she broke off the relationship, having met an attractive and sophisticated Italian major. After the war, Hemingway pined friends in Chicago, where he met Hadley Richardson, whom he would marry. In the first novel *The Sun Also Rises*, his central character, Lady Brett Ashley, is a multidimensional character that has been excoriated by many (mostly male) critics as a "bitch" because her behavior does not fit conventional gender expectations. She has many lovers- a trait that's acceptable for men, but not for women, they think. She takes lovers because the man she truly loves, Jake Barnes, has been unnamed in the war, and Brett is fixated on the phallus, personified in the text by Pedro Romero, the young bullfighter. Moreover, in a reversal of traditional gender role, the emasculated Jake is always there for Brett after her affairs end. Jake understands what many critics have not, namely that Brett has been damaged by the war as well: her first love has been killed, and the man to whom she's married has been mentally scared in the war and is abusive.

Most of the combat scenes of the war are based on real incidents. Hemingway encountered during the war. For decade, critics maintained that the experiences of Frederic Henry *A Farewell to Arms* were based upon Hemingway's experience in Italy during the Great War, and it wasn't until critics such as Charles Fenton in his *The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway* revealed Hemingway's depiction of war was a more accurate understanding of how mimetic elements are employed in the novel began to appear. There are, of course, still some autobiographical elements within *A Farewell to Arms* evident in incidents such as Fredric Henry's wounding by mortar fire and in characters such as Rinaldi, who is based on the Italian captain and Hemingway's friend Enrico Serena; Count Greffi, the ninety-eight years old Count Greffi, who befriended Hemingway in Italy; and most notably Catherine Barkley, who is a composite base on nurse Agnes Von Kurowsky and other women Hemingway had known such as his first two wives, Hadley Richardson, and Pauline Pfeiffer. However, much of what Fredric Henry experiences are the result of Hemingway's imagination or the use of historical research.

Despite the differences caused by the authors' experiences during the Great War and by the author's different intentions, those novels collectively a general mimetically accurate portrayal of the Great War's physical realities. They demonstrate the frequent ennui and the impersonal violence of the trenches and battlefield; they recreate the terrors of artillery and gas bombardment and dreamlike attacks across no man's land, and they demonstrate the loss of American innocence in the Great War. They provide a fairly comprehensive view of what the First World War was like for the more than two million Americans who witnessed it. More important, during this time, Hemingway's work moved away from stories with rich characters and turned toward political realities, most notably in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* about the Spanish Civil War, which appeared just as World War 2 was breaking out. The novel features two women, Pilar, a resistance fighter and one of Hemingway's strongest female characters, Maria, the docile love interest. Physically she resembles Gertrude Stein, and like Stein, she is described as a figure of ambiguous gender who combines a masculine size with

feminine qualities. The start of World War 2 signaled an economic change for women, many of whom were now assuming men's jobs in defense factories and other industries as men volunteered or were drafted into the armed services. During the postwar period, Hemingway published his weakest novel, *Across the River and Into the Trees*, inspired in part by his infatuation with a young Venetian woman, Adriana Ivancich, whom he fictionalizes as the love interest of an aging army colonel. His next book, *The Old Man and The Sea* does not include any female characters, and if it were not for Hemingway's had lost the ability to create the strong, complex female characters that had been a staple of his work up to the 1950s.

CONCLUSIONS

Hemingway prefers his women, like Catherine Barkley in *A Farewell to Arms* as submissive and flat. Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises* is portrayed as a "female who never become a woman" and she perused courses of action which run counter to the wishes of the men with whom she is associated. She is a nymphomaniac whose mind is disordered by the impact of war. The woman is a mere cardboard slave and exists solely to increase the stature of the man. Independent women are not proper foils for the male hero whose superiority requires subservience. He already noted Maria is Hemingway's most fully drawn and interesting woman character who not only has the capacity to give her fully in love but to uphold her political conviction to fight against the fascists in the Spanish Civil War. Maria has suffered the loss in war between her father and mother, who died courageously defending the Republican cause. Her sexual wounds are not metaphorical, as in the two earlier novels, for she literally suffered rape and humiliation at the hands of the fascists. Like Catherine and Brett, she has been made crazy by the violation of her identity as a woman. Women in Hemingway's fiction are traditionally an important part of the love relationship and the article analyses his changing conception of them with their deficiencies or attributes in the novels chosen for the study. By situating Hemingway's work historically within the sexual and gender revolution of his time, we find ample evidence that he immersed himself in contemporary scientific writings and societal discourse about the sexual impute, sexual pleasure, sexual differences, and new sexual formations such as homosexuality, transsexuality, and lesbianism. He was fascinated by the complications and opportunities that the new rules definitions, and identities brought for both men and women. Recognizing this history helps us to appreciate the complexities of both his male and female characters as well as the gender and sexual complexities of Hemingway himself.

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