



## **SYMBOLISM IN EARNEST HEMINGWAY'S A FAREWELL TO ARMS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Hemingway is an American novelist famous for his wise use of symbolism in his novels. His novel 'A Farewell to Arms' has a wide range of symbols in it. It mostly exhibits symbols related to nature like rain, mountains, sun etc. This masterpiece is Hemingway's magnum opus and a delight to read in true sense.*

**Keywords-** Symbolism, Earnest Hemingway, A farewell to Arms, Mountain, Rain, Plain,

### **INTRODUCTION**

Ernest Hemingway embodies the external reality's world in his novels and short stories. Hemingway is treated as a Naturalist because of his excellent treatment with his interest War, hunting, fishing and bull-fighting.

Hemingway's realism had deep suggestiveness but he made use of his symbols judiciously. Although this use of Symbolism is limited but he uses it very finely and he is a very fine Symbolist. Hemingway's works were not only a factual account description but they also acquired deep meaning through the use of Symbolism. His reputation as a great artist is

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contributed due to his dealing with his symbols. His art is permanent and it is built on the foundation of mixing truth and symbolism. He borrows his symbolism from the material world. In *Snows of Kiliminjaro*, Vultures and Hyenas are symbols of death. Hemingway expresses his philosophy of life through the use of Symbolism in a successful manner. Originality and sustaining powers are imbued in his works. Hemingway depicts the reality which is significant due to hidden meaning.

Hemingway uses limited Symbolism but he uses them judiciously. In *Snows of Kiliminjaro*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *For Whom the Death Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea* limited use of symbolism gives the novel a new dimension.

Critics started analyzing, noticing and appreciating Hemingway's works only after 1944 after Malcolm Cowley's suggestion that Hemingway should be in a group of the authors who dealt with the symbolism and imagism of the inner world. And should not be grouped among the realists and since then the critics have been very keenly reading Symbolism in Hemingway's Novels. Carlos Baker finds that *A Farewell to Arms* has been given an essential meaning the use of two major symbols- The Plains and the Mountains. The Images are built on the concepts of 'The Home' and 'The Not Home' and each concept is a kind type of intuition of poetry with emotional values charged.

### **Symbolism in *A Farewell to Arms***

The three major and chief symbols in the novel *A Farewell to Arms* are- Rain, The Mountains and The Plains.

The Mountains symbolize Home and Plain symbolize lack of shelter, low security, danger, destruction, obscenity, loss of faith in God. The first sentence of the first chapter introduces Mountains and the mountain symbol goes on throughout the novel: Mountain not only symbolizes Home but they are also symbolic of health, dignity, happiness, good life; Mountain are also symbolic of belief in God or atleast God's consciousness.

The plains on the other hand are symbolic of death, suffering, indignity, war, irreligious, and obscenity. Henry is told by the Priest that Priest's homeland Abruzzi beyond it has mountains, with snow cold and dry, it has polite and kind people, and those people have hospitality and natural beauty.

In contrast to priest's Abruzzi stand the officers of the low-lying plain. The officers are loaded with obscenity, they bait Priest, Prostitutes and Cheap Cafes are visited by them daily. They are drunkards and they have a regular habit of drinking. They all are symbolic of destruction and all the evil practices. Henry starts his love affair with Catherine as a wartime

rotten game of seduction. But he very soon develops true feelings for her and becomes honored and dignified man.

When Henry and Catherine reach a small village, after escaping, they live in a villa surrounded by snow. At this point the mountain image comes alive through Catherine. Catherine signifies happiness, home, comfort, security like mountains do.

The recurrent symbol of the novel is Rain. The reference to the Rain is made in the first chapter itself. This rain brings cholera because of this cholera epidemic seven thousand people die. Catherine expresses her fear for rain because Catherine could see herself dead in it. For her, Rain becomes a reason for her death. Rain accompanies all the events that are disastrous in the novel. It is raining during the Caporetto Retreat, after Henry's wound recovery and health recovery, when the lover's part away, Catherine's labor pains and her death, all these incidents and episodes are followed and accompanied by the Rain. The rain signifies distress, death, and misfortune.

Prof. Carlos Baker, after thoroughly analyzing the novel *A Farewell to Arms* traced 'The Home' and 'The Not Home' symbols of the novel. These two concepts are symbolized by Mountains and The Plains. Carlos Baker expresses that Mountain is God's abode, symbolic of natural beauty, the vulgarity and obscenity is associated with the Plains. The doom atmosphere is created in the first chapter. Death and the nothingness is symbolized by dust over which the troop marches. The action is symbolic of troops mingling and ending up in dust. In the end of the chapter it is raining, symbolic of death the rain is incessant in the novel and also falling at interval. It is raining throughout in the retreat and throughout Henry's fight. Catherine is afraid of rain when they are in Milan hospital. She says "I see me dead in it."

## **Weather Symbolism**

### **Snow**

The unrevised truth of war is attempted to be told by Hemingway. He intends to present an honest and true account and a heroic account. He wanted to present account of reflect combat, and an account of soldier's life when they are not at war. Yet Hemingway's realist approach for his subjects does not prevent him from using the literary device.

War is represented realistically in the novel. Weather is used as a basic component of experiences of the war. Weather is not only used realistically in the novel, but also used for symbolic purpose as well. Rain is often equalized with life, nourishment and regeneration but in *A Farewell to Arms* it stands for death and destruction. The snow is symbolic of hope.



Ice and Snow are logically represent death and danger in stories like *To Build a Fire* BY Jack London. Freezing to death is symbolized by snow, one may fall through ice and drown and might die. In *A Farewell to Arms* chapter II, the snow on the other hand stops the fighting that has been continued from the Chapter I of the novel. The Snow puts an end to the fight. Thus here snow is symbolic of safety and security. Late Priest's home at Abruzzi is described by Henry as "a place where the roads were frozen and hard as iron, where it was clear and cold and dry and the snow was dry and powdery. These statements provide a positive characterization.

Later in the novel when Henry and Catherine reach the Swiss Alps there is snow all around. Thus they temporarily achieve a purity life.

### **Rain**

The inevitable disintegration of life's happiness is symbolized by Rain in the novel. The weather is infused with meaning by Catherine when she is lying on a bed with Henry. The rain is falling on the roof, Catherine confesses her fear for the rain and says rain is powerful enough to ruin lover's life and things. However, no phenomenon has such power but Catherine's fear proves to be true and comes into existence because rain actually destroys and spoils lover's life. After Catherine dies, Henry walks back home the hospital to the hotel in rain. Here Catherine's fear comes alive and it is valid hence.

In the very first chapter, rain is symbolic of death. "in the fall.....rain".

Henry tells us "the vineyards are thin.....". the rain is not a literary conceit simply as it is responsible for the cholera epidemic which is in turn responsible for seven thousand deaths.

The rain as a symbol becomes covert for the readers as well as for Henry. During the Milan idyll. She says to Henry "I see me dead in it". "And sometimes I see you dead in it". During a trip to hotel on Henry's last day with Catherine before he was returning for trip, the fog that was covering the whole city changed to rain. When Catherine and Henry bid each other farewell it is raining.

It rains continuously during the Caporetto Retreat chapter. When the battle tide turns and Italian start retreating from the fighting German and the Caporetto.

When Henry as a fugitive starts from Stresa in a train, it is raining at the time of Henry's arrival and it is also raining when Henry and Catherine arrive in the hotel room. The trip in



open boat to Lake Maggiore happens in the rain. In chapter XL, when Catherine and Henry bid farewell to retreat in the mountain of winter time and they start for city in which Catherine's child is to take birth.

During Catherine protraction, when Henry leaves for lunch from the hospital "the day was cloudy and the sun was trying to come through." When Catherine is operated and Henry looks out of the window he sees the rain. When nurse tells Henry about his dead baby Henry sees outside and he sees nothing but rains. At the end of the novel Henry walks back hotel from the hospital and it is raining. The last word in the novel *A Farewell to Arms*, is Rain, which signifies the importance of weather in the novel. So as to inform the disastrous nature of rain and make symbolism pattern clear he makes Catherine to assert that she sees herself dead in it. Rain and Snow capture our interest all over the novel. The plot is driven by symbol of Rain and Snow. We get afraid and worried of Catherine's death and her perish everytime it rains in the novel. *A Farewell to Arms* is definitely a War saga told with the blend of symbolism and love-affair.

Rain is used as a symbol widely and it is highly admired. The way climate idea is related to mythological structure is less apparent to the reader. It begins to rain in Italy just before Henry's Gorizia return from recovery of his war wound. The rain continues, steadily at first, intermittently, during Caporetto Retreat, Henry's flight to Stresa, and it rains during Henry and Catherine's reunion night. When they wake up in the morning after night's reunion the rain has stopped. Some sort of symbol of disaster is symbolized with the rain's return. The reader's recognize rain as a disaster symbol. Just before Henry's return to the front when they are in Milan hospital it is raining. In a break during conversation the rainfall comes. In Lausanne, the the rain's sound comes until Catherine dies in the hospital and Henry walks to the Hotel in the rain.

### **Mountain; The Home and The Not Home**

The activity on the surface of *A Farewell to Arms* is connotatively organized around two poles of Home and Not Home, each is a Poetic intuition concept filled with emotional values. The concept of home is associated with the mountains; with quiet and peace; they are symbolic of love; good life; health, dignity, and it is associated with and it is associated with existence or atleast God's consciousness. The Not Home is related to The Plains: it is symbolic of obscenity, suffering, nervousness, death and irreligion.

In the novel, the image of the mountains starts developing in the beginning from chapter 2. When Priest learns about Henry's leaving he urges Henry to visit Caporetto in Abruzzi priests says, "there" he says "is good hunting." You would like the place and though its cold, it is clean and dry. You could stay with my family. My father is a famous hunter". But the



lowlander infantry captain interrupts: "come on" he says in Pidgin Italian to Fredric Henry, "we go to whore house before it shuts."

The Mountain image is quietly consolidated throughout the book I. on the way to Isonzo from Gorizia, Henry looks across the river and the plain to the Julian and Carnic Alps: "I looked to the north at the two images of the mountains, green and dark to the snow-line and lovely in the sun. then I saw a third range of mountains.....". Hemingway is using the mountains symbolically. When he lowers his eyes from the far-off ranges, he sees the plain and the river, the war making equipment, and "the broken houses of the little town". The mountain image has now already developed man of God's association and his and his homeland's. The opposition of mountains are- Priest baiting Captain, Prostitutes, Cafes, Drunkenness, war and destruction.

The trench mortar explosion kills Henry nearly, when the Priest comes to visit him in the hospital, the Abruzzi acquires an association with religion. He says "There in my country it is understood that man may love God and it is not a joke". Hemingway makes Henry to develop in his mind eye a picture of priest's homeland which is idyllic.

Henry and Catherine are not out of the rain until they settle in idyllic and quiet life above Montreux in a rented chalet. They are out of the danger when they are in the mountains. They are out of the debacle of war. The deep snow isolates them and they are given domestic safety, tranquility, and invulnerability.

By the Book I closure, largely through Priest's agency a connection that is complex is established between the idea of Home and The High Ground combination, love, cold, weather.

Rinaldi Versus The Priest The central structure reinforcement is provided by the Priest and the Doctor they are The Man of God and The Man without God, the contrast becomes prominent after Henry's return to the Gorizia area after his discharge from the hospital.

Things are bad with Rinaldi, the doctor, too, though not professional wise. He has performed many operations on wounded soldiers. He is regarded as a man without resources because in spite of being a successful doctor he has habit of drinking and goes to prostitute and these habits interfere with his work and job. He is the man of plains and the man without God.

Priest, a man who stands in contrast to Rinaldi, is a man from Abruzzi highlands. With him things are not bad "he was the same as ever." says Henry. "small and brown and compact looking", he is much more sure of him than formerly though in a modest way. "I could see" says Henry, "that the baiting did not touch him now." Priest draws hope even from the evils



of the past summer. He thinks that officers and men are getting down because they are “realizing the war” as never before. And the fight will not continue for much longer. Henry argues what he is thinking as coming down is actually a sense of defeat and nothing else. “it is in defeat that we become Christians like our Lord.” But priest denies to accept that Christ’s humility was the result of such terrible ordeal. Priest has resources which Dr. Rinaldi does not possess.

The Priest and Doctor contrast carried out in sacred versus profane love antithesis in the novel. The Priest-Doctor contrast is carried out in the sacred- versus- profane love antithesis in the novel. Through the agency of Rinaldi the love affair begins at a fairly low level. The doctor introduces Henry to Catherine, and takes a jocularly profane view of the early infatuation, thinking it to be just a case of war-time seduction. On the other hand, the background symbol of home and true love and high ground suggests that the lover’s idyllic life in Switzerland is carried on under the spiritual auspices of the priest-neither. Rinaldi nor the priest appears in the latter part of the novel. But when, having been driven to the lowlands Catherine enters the hospital, it is naturally enough a doctor who takes over. And though this doctor does all he can to save her life, Catherine dies.

When bringing Catherine Barkley to the degree of the central image. Henry and Catherine affair starts as a war-time’s “Rotten-Game”. Emotionally shattered because of her fiancé’s death, Catherine is an easy prey for this trap of “rotten game”. But in the . But in the American hospital at Milan, following Henry’s ordeal by fire at the front not far from Isonzo, the casual affair becomes an honorable though unpriested marriage. Because she can make a “home” out of any room she occupies-and Henry several times alludes to this power of hers-Catherine naturally moves into association with ideas of home, love and happiness. She does not really reach the centre of the mountain image until, on the heels of Henry’s harrowing lowland experiences during the retreat from Caporetto, the lovers move to Switzerland. Catherine is the first to go, and Henry follows her as if were the genius of the mountains, beckoning on him. Soon they are settled into a supreme happy life in the winterland on the mountain side above Montreux. Catherine’s death occurs at Lausanne, after the March rains and the approaching need for a good-lying hospital have driven the couple down from their magic mountain- the closest approximation to the priest’s fair homeland in Abruzzi that they are ever to know.

American literature is incomplete without mentioning Ernest Hemingway and his introduction is incomplete without mentioning his one of the greatest novel’s of all time i.e A Farewell to Arms. The above mentioned symbols are major symbols of the novel but needless to say a reader with imagination can extract many more minor symbols while reading this masterpiece.



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