

# Frederic henry's traumas and pain in "a farewell to arms"



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As we know, PTSD (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder) is a mental disorder that can develop after a person is exposed to a traumatic event, which is warfare for Frederic Henry in this novel. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic Henry's trauma and general breakdown in his life can best be understood in terms of PTSD, because it explains: his self-doubts and depression; his detachment from the other characters; and his inability to help himself. Throughout the novel, Frederic's recollections show various catalysts for PTSD.

Even though Frederic tries to keep calm and forget about the memories about the past which he suffered in the war, there are certain details flashback into his mind. Frederic Henry has been suffering with a condition of traumatized while he describes the story. Frederic constantly changes his identity because of some shocking incidents he experienced such as the death of his wife, Catherine, who died when she gave birth and witnessing of terrible scenes during the war. Frederic describes he is tormented by a series of traumas because he participated in the Great War. Through Frederic's experiences, seen through the current description of PTSD, the reader has a deeper understanding of the negative effects of war on the individual.

Frederic does not only receive physical wounds but he also memorized which he experienced in the war. Frederic indicates at least three occasions which make him mentally scared and these contribute to his self-doubts later.

Frederic witnesses a lot of death of his comrades, after the first battle is, I sat up straight and as I did so something inside my head moved like the weights on a doll's eyes and it hit me inside in back of my eyeballs. (Ernest Hemingway: P59) Frederic reveals his inner thoughts when he is looking at the dead body of his ally. Frederic must think of it a lot he can still keep such a deep

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memory for this particular scene, therefore suggesting he is traumatized from the terrible events that he has experienced and lived through. Frederic can also be suspected to be affected from the way he portrays how the dead bodies were treated. The drops fell very slowly, as they fall from an icicle after the sun has gone. (Ernest Hemingway: P66) After being recovered from the battle, it is clear that Frederic's mind changed a lot, but he has to see soldiers stepping the dead soldiers' body like garbage bags. This traumatize Frederic's mind, as no one can keep calm while their dead friends' bodies are being thrown out onto the roads, but Frederic shows no immediate react. He does not wish to recall the gruesome image which suggests that the entire ordeal still haunts him. Frederic proves how traumatized he is from the war as he is describing the 'shelling', and the series of bombings which is a tactic used during World War I that caused the condition he still has to this day. You saw the flash, then heard the crack, then saw the smoke distort and thin in the wind (Ernest Hemingway: P197) Frederic is good at describing the characteristics of these bombings, yet he never mentions either how unendurable the loud sounds are, or the gruesome scenes of soldiers torn up by the splashing bombs. Both things which are constantly mentioned by others when describing shelling. From his style of narration Frederic is not one who hides the bloody scenes found in a battle. If he does not mention it, Frederic must be still terrified of the shelling and does not want to provoke this particular memory within his mind while narrating. His use of this particular defensive technique of shutting down memories is caution from suffers of severe traumas, and it is clearly shown that Frederic received it from his experiences during the 'Great War'. All of these examples lead to for the conclusion that Frederic is shell shocked during World War I, and the <https://assignbuster.com/frederic-henrys-traumas-and-pain-in-a-farewell-to-arms/>

condition still haunts him while he narrates. These scars from war do not stand alone, as his constant change of identities which baffles him of who he truly is eventually causes permanent damage to his mind that inflicts just as much pain as war traumas.

Frederic's constant change of identity scars him mentally and leads him to feel detached from the events taking place around him. The war causes so much change for him, which is also a part shows his PTSD symptoms, and he goes through at least two dramatic change: from being a soldier to a normal civilian, from being a free man to a wanted criminal. Frederic's long experience in the army causes him to forget how to be a normal civilian, which impacts him psychologically. In civilian clothes I felt a masquerader. I had been in uniform a long time and I missed the feeling of being held by your clothes. (Ernest Hemingway: P260) Frederic had been so involved in the war he had become part of it, and once he stopped being surrounded by soldiers and guns, he suddenly felt lost. As if he does not fit in a civilized society to such an extent that even normal clothes feel odd on him. When Frederic narrates this scene, he can still remember this strong feeling, which could suggest he still carries that feeling while he is narrating, which can be a sign of the aftermath of serve experiences. If a person constantly feels as if he does not belong to where he is it may cause of low self-esteem and other side effects from. Frederic's second change of identity happened even faster than the first one, as he transforms from a free man to a wanted criminal in less than a day. I dressed hearing the rain on the windows.

I did not have much to put in my bag. (Ernest Hemingway: P284) This

sudden change can certainly provoke symptoms of depression within

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Frederic, as it has been only a few days since he was a proud soldier, and now he is wanted by the army. Frederic is lost, he does not know where he is heading, both in physically and mentally. The 'rain on the windows' is potentially symbolism used by the traumatized Frederic as he is narrating, for when he looks back at that particular moment, he is leaving the place that shields him from all the rain, which also can be seen as danger and trouble. Frederic's constant changes of identity continue to torment him when Catherine dies. I went into the room and stayed with Catherine until she died...it did not take her very long to die. (Ernest Hemingway: P355) This is the last and fastest transition Frederic goes through in A Farewell to Arms, and undoubtedly the most painful. From being a father-to-be to suddenly a widower in less than a day, Frederic must have been very confused. It is safe to assume Frederic will be afraid to face any changes in the future, as all the alterations he encountered within the book are always more shocking and negative than the previous, ergo he is traumatized by all the turmoil he receives while going through all three life changing events within A Farewell to Arms. While Frederic is narrating all these events, his loss of emotions proves that he is still suffering from the aftermath from all the changes he has gone through. Not only does the death of Catherine alter Frederic's identity in life, it is also a huge traumatization for him that still frightens him while he narrates.

Frederic also is narrating while under traumatized by conditions partially due to the death of Catherine. He is mentally injured from this incident because of how he viewed Catherine's dead body, his loss of reason and his reaction to Catherine's death. Before leaving the hospital, Frederic says goodbye to

Catherine's body, and the way he described the interaction is crucial to the reason why Frederic is permanently traumatized from the death of Catherine. It was like saying goodbye to a statue (Ernest Hemingway: P355) Frederic loved Catherine, a fact he cannot stress enough. The final farewell towards Catherine's body is an emotional event, yet when Frederic describes the scene he never mentions any thoughts that pass through his mind, and even more by saying 'it was like saying goodbye to a statue' Frederic means he carries no feelings toward Catherine's body. This is a sign of mental trauma because Frederic has been through so much torment throughout the war, he no longer feels anything about death. The numbness he carries while narrating this scene is a symptom of shell shock, which is why Frederic narrates while being in a traumatic condition. Frederic's damaged mind is revealed from his immediate loss of common sense after the death of Catherine. After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain. (Ernest Hemingway: P355) Frederic did not have to walk through the rain. He was allowed to stay in the hospital and spend some time with Catherine's body until the rain passed. From his actions it seems as he just wanted to go back to the last spot—he and Catherine were together. The moment he walks into the rain, his last bit of sanity is lost, and he fully experiences the last shock that adds to his permanent traumatization that torments him even when he is narrating. Frederic hides all his emotions even while he is narrating. 'No', I said. 'There's nothing to say.' (Ernest Hemingway: P355) Frederic explains the event of the death of Catherine without any feelings and emotions. I'm not brave any more, darling. I'm all broken. They've broken me. I know it now. (Ernest Hemingway: P355) This is a sign of denial, which is a defense

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mechanism that comes from a severe trauma. Frederic is a veteran, so it is common for him to not want to show any weakness, however he does not mention a single word about how sad he is towards Catherine dying, which is unnatural. The only possible explanation for his behavior is he is highly traumatized and he either voluntarily or involuntarily chooses to close off all his emotions in order to appear to remain calm and sane. The above reasons show why Catherine's death plays an important role in the permanent break down of Frederic's mind.

The trauma is experienced by Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms* has left considerable emotional scars that will shape his life and the symptoms still haunts him when he is narrating the story. This can be seen from the way he describes his war experiences, the way he hides his emotions when going through the major events in the story and the way he loses common sense after Catherine's death. However, he is helpless in understanding how this will affect him and he innocently that by simply returning to his homeland he can put all their behind him. This is not only his illusion but that he held by everyone else to at that time. In conclusion, when Frederic narrates the scenes of *A Farewell to Arms*, the recollections that he is bringing up still hurt him mentally as he suffers permanent traumatization from during the war, while he is going through the important memories and after Catherine's death.

Hecht, Ben, and Ernest Hemingway. *A Farewell to Arms: Screenplay*. 1957.