

War's bond



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Ernest Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms* features the numbing experiences of Lieutenant Federico Henry while serving in Italy during World War I. Despite serving as such a dimly despondent milieu, the war actually acts as a powerful catalyst in creating, as well as reinforcing, relationships between fellow humans. Lt. Henry's indelible bond with his lover, the intimate friendship he shares with his comrades, and the close ties he creates with common civilians are all illustrations of how war can bring people together. Introduced to one another at a British hospital near the front, Lieutenant Henry and Catherine Barkley grow closer and closer to one another over the course of the story. Initially, however, their relationship is quite superficial; though they may say endearing things to one another, they both know that neither means what they're saying. Lt. Henry even admits: "I knew that I did not love Catherine Barkley nor had any idea of loving her. This was a game, like bridge, in which you said things instead of playing cards" (30). Catherine herself is also aware of this fact, acknowledging, "This is a rotten game we play, isn't it?...You don't have to pretend you love me.... It sounds very funny now-Catherine. You don't pronounce it much alike" (31). In this context, it almost seems as if Catherine is trying to delude herself into believing that her dead boyfriend (another soldier who had been killed in Somme) has been reincarnated in the form of Lt. Henry. After Lt. Henry gets badly wounded by a trench mortar shell, he and Catherine reunite at the hospital in Milan. It is at this junction that they begin to realize how much they mean to each other-death is a proven reality that can happen at any time. Their initial attraction to each other has now blossomed into a deep, sincere love. It is this love that isolates and protects them from the cruel, war-battered world around them. This is illustrated by the image of Catherine's hair when they

are making love: I loved to take her hair down and she sat on the bed and kept very still except suddenly she would dip down to kiss me while I was doing it, and I would take out the pins and lay them on the sheet and it would be loose and I would watch her while she kept very still and then take out the last two pins and it would all come down and she would drop her head and we would both be inside of it, and it was the feeling of inside a tent or behind a falls (114). This image of isolation and comfort recurs when Lt. Henry and Catherine are at the horse races; Catherine reflects, “ Don’t you like it better when we’re all alone?...I felt very lonely when they were all there” (132). Another example is right after Catherine has revealed to Henry that she is pregnant and says that they should not fight with each other “[b]ecause there’s only us two and in the world there’s all the rest of them. If anything comes between us we’re gone and then they have us” (139). A final example of this imagery occurs the day that Lt. Henry must return to the front after his hospital recovery; he and Catherine are spending their last hours together walking around town, and at one point when they kiss, “ she had pulled [his] cape over her so that it covered both of [them]” (150). Love acts as a cloak of protection and hope when there is barely any hope or happiness left around them. During times of war, the bond of comrades-in-arms is indissoluble. They share the common fear of death and the longing to be with loved ones, away from battle-theirs is the reality of war. Two people serving in the war who are especially close to Lt. Henry are Rinaldi and the priest. In many aspects, Rinaldi and the priest are foils for one another; the playful Rinaldi keeps his friend happy through the pleasures of the flesh, while the more dignified priest urges Lt. Henry to attain happiness through spiritual and emotional development. For one, it is no other than

Rinaldi himself who introduces Catherine Barkley to Henry; one can even say that he gave her up to Henry (He had been the one to first meet her and had intended to date her.). After Henry is wounded, Rinaldi is the first to visit him at the field hospital, armed with a bottle of cognac. He comforts Henry, assuring him that he will get all sorts of medals for this wound. We learn the depth of their friendship when Rinaldi reveals how much he misses seeing Henry: " I wish you were back. No one to come in at night from adventures. No one to make fun of. No one to lend me money. No blood brother and roommate. Why do you get yourself wounded?" (65). After Henry has recovered from his wound and is back at the front, Rinaldi expresses his desire that the war end: " The war is terrible...Come on. We'll both get drunk and be cheerful" (168). This illustrates the quick-fix manner of coping with stress for Rinaldi: getting drunk and/or hiring prostitutes. He hints at this when he states, " I only like two other things; one is bad for my work and the other is over in half an hour or fifteen minutes" (170). In stark contrast, the priest is much more of an intellectual man who believes that Lt. Henry can find comfort in pure, spiritual things as a diversion to the war. A great example of this is when Lt. Henry is contemplating where to go on leave. All the other soldiers recommend various Italian towns, distinguished for their prostitutes, their " fine girls...beautiful young girls" (8). The priest, however, suggests that Henry visit Abruzzi, where "[t]here is good hunting. You would like the people and though it is cold it is clear and dry" (9). The priest's outlook on coping with the war is drastically different from that of Rinaldi; instead of merely temporarily tuning out the war through quick fixes-alcohol and prostitutes-he proposes a different type of escape. When he visits the wounded Henry, he points out the difference between the prostitutes and

true love: “ What you tell me about in the nights. That is not love. That is only passion and lust. When you love you wish to do things for. You wish to sacrifice for. You wish to serve.... You will [love]. I know you will. Then you will be happy” (72). For the priest, love is the only force that can possibly stand up to the ravages of war. While lust is only a temporary escape, love is a solution which heals the wounds of war. In the latter part of the novel, the reader witnesses the type of bond formed between Lt. Henry and civilians whom he encounters. Three particular individuals demonstrate the decency of the common man during harsh times. When Henry lands in Milan after almost being shot for being a German spy, he stops into a wine shop for a break. After the bartender gives him a glass of grappa, he immediately offers his assistance: “ If you are in trouble, I can keep you.... If you have no papers I can give you papers” (238-9). When Henry seems hesitant, the bartender reassures him and advises, “ Remember. Come here. Do not let other people take you in. Here you are all right.... Don't forget that I am your friend” (239). After Henry has made up his mind to escape to Switzerland, he comes to Simmons (one of his singing friends) for help. Simmons happily gives Henry new clothes (to avoid being recognized) and points out a safe way to Switzerland. Finally, when Henry and Catherine have taken temporary refuge in the Hotel des Iles Borromées (located near the lake by which they are to get to Switzerland), it is the hotel barman who warns them that the Italians are coming to arrest Henry. Furthermore, he even agrees to let them have his boat. In doing this, he risks himself to the danger of the Italians finding out that he had given his boat to a criminal. He also goes so far as to trust Henry to pay him back when they've reached safety. Thus, although Farewell to Arms portrays World War I as a horrendous event in history, the reader

can grasp that it also had the potential to bring out the best in man and his fellow man. The war causes Lt. Henry and Catherine Barkley's initial flirting to blossom into a powerful love; the war helps Henry form intimate friendships with his comrades; the war brings out the generosity and self-sacrifice from common individuals, without which Henry could never have escaped the war alive. It is in these toughest of situations that men either band together or perish alone.