

# A farewell to arms film vs text essay

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Put Out on the First "Date": The Selective Representation of Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms

The deeply philosophical work of Ernest Hemingway was taken under artistic license and possibly political agenda when it was produced in film. In A Farewell to Arms, Hemingway paints, with broad strokes of disillusionment, over the ideals of honor, war and love as a preoccupation or distraction from the realities of life. The reader is left with the impression of the constant human drive to distract itself whether with alcohol, violence, anesthesia or passion. But the film focuses on the love story and the trials it faces through a backdrop of faith and war. The alterations made in the representations of the characters, love and war leave the viewer with only a hint of the deeper questions presented in the novel.

Lieutenant Frederic Henry is portrayed in novel as a generally well disciplined, reserved and good natured. He did not partake in the teasing of the priest despite his lack of faith and even endeavored to mollify any perceived slights with the man. Henry could never muster any reason for joining the Italian army other than just being in Italy at the time and speaking the language.

He does not feel any particular allegiance, even having the opinion that, "It was impossible to salute foreigners as an Italian, without embarrassment" (Hemingway 23). Henry just doesn't seem to care one way or the other which army he was a part of so long as the action would distract him from anything else. In the novel, he assists a man trying to get away from the front line, grows attached to a woman because she is there, becomes an alcoholic, and shoots men in his command because they wouldn't help with the retreat. And yet these actions were permissible in the fact that they were

a result of his circumstance and not his character. He was presented to the reader as a man ever looking for something to occupy his mind and body from reality.

In the film however, all of these actions were cut out except for the ones involving Catherine. An entirely different character is established when he brushes aside the feelings of his friend when he obstinately steals Catherine's attention from him and proceeds to deflower her in a church courtyard. Catherine was not as altered in the transition to the silver screen, other than the omission of her initial recollections of her dead fiance and her deception and going off pregnant and on her own when Henry must return to the front line.

The complications that were involved with the development of her character in the novel slightly mistranslated in the film as seeming as though she was constantly living in a dream world, refusing reality. While she certainly was not alone in her delusions of enduring happiness in the text, she was portrayed as alone in the film for most of her pregnancy. In the novel there was constant discourse with Henry as the two of them were away in the country or sequestered away in some hotel room. In the film there is a hint of feminism when Catherine's friend Ms.

Ferguson complains about the current role of women in the war and her reoccurring dismay on her own loneliness. The role of women was going under a reconstruction, though not as hot a topic it would become after the Second World War. The war, itself, is incredibly downplayed in a total screen representation of perhaps ten minutes.

The simplistic but enthralling manner in which Ernest Hemingway writes his chapters regarding the war effort are completely thrown away in order to film a romance. There is camaraderie among the soldiers and an active lifestyle that Henry misses while he is away with Catherine in the country. The war was not something that this industry was trying to sell; it was trying to promote it as a needless obstacle to happiness where the novel simply presented it as a function of man.

When reading this novel, the idea of love fell into the same ideals that Henry found empty and overused. But, the film portrayed the romance as a definite and overpowering thing. In the text, this couple was simply juxtaposed and a romance ensued. There was a war going on and people were dying. That hovering reality drives a person to find solace in any way they can. In the film, Henry is portrayed as a man on the hunt and Catherine was easy prey. They are not described as being sexually intimate until much later in the story, and while this could have been interpreted as the first time any actually feeling emerged between the two, it was an incredibly liberal interpretation that the nurse put out in the first encounter—considering Catherine, Henry, Ferguson, and Rinaldi were all present at the occasion.

In the novel, love was an aspiration and a preferable occupation no matter what time you have with a person or their past. Catherine seems to still have her ex fiance in her mind when she comments on vague differences between him and her new suitor such as, ““ You don’t pronounce it very much alike”” (Hemingway 31). It was simply a convenient affair of emotions that kept a man and a woman’s mind off of the war. But the movie did not include these

subtleties that amassed into disillusionment. The end of the film there is a dramatic scene in which Henry soothes Catherine's fear of abandonment and she bravely dies and he lifts her up in his arms, pulling the white sheets with him off the bed as church bells ring out into the rain. This is a much more romanticized version of the, " she was unconscious all the time, and it did not take her very long to die" (Hemingway 331).

The novel was rich in anti-illusion and focused on the realities of humanity and life, but the film only hinted at these themes. People will find distraction from pain, even if the actions cause more pain. All ideals of honor, loyalty, and love will be a threat to rationality. But the drive for distraction is natural. After Henry leaves the effort of the war he feels like he has no purpose in life. In a discussion with Catherine he explained the usefulness of the distraction that was the war, "' that's how I worked it at the front. But there was something to do then'" (Hemingway 257).

The film cuts this portion out of the story as well as invents its own drama as Catherine hides the fact she is pregnant and runs away to Switzerland and letters are kept from their recipients. This added drama ironically adds to the message the book sends of the need for drama as distraction from an uncomfortable reality. Seeing Henry doubt his actions after reuniting with his love and seeing that even real emotion is fleeting in life is not what the movie would ruin the romance. Aristotle coveted the unity of time, place and action as the key to enthralling an audience—and this could be an excuse snatched up by the film industry, but cutting so much from the novel changes the message of the story. The farewell in A Farewell to Arms is both

to the conflict of war and his current preoccupation of love as Henry and the reader is left to finally face the harsh and hollow realities of life.

Works Cited Hemingway, Ernest. *A Farewell to Arms*. New York: Scribner Classics, 1997.