

An essay on the narrative structure of a farewell to arms



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Ernest Hemingway's novel, *A Farewell to Arms*, follows a distinct narrative structure. Each component of the plot – exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution – is contained within a book. This definite sectioning allows the audience to follow and map the plot of the story.

The first book of the narrative contains the exposition, or introduction to the story. The protagonist, Lieutenant Frederic Henry, is an American serving in the Italian Army during World War I. He is an officer working as an ambulance driver. Another central character, Catherine Barkley, is also introduced during this book. Catherine is a British nurse who volunteered to serve in the war. At this stage in the novel, the characters are in Italy, fighting to prevent the Austro-Hungarian forces from joining the Germans on the Western front. Although an initial conflict is not obvious, Hemingway emphasizes the scenery surrounding the war, suggesting that the war and Italy are central to the story line. At the end of this book, Frederic is wounded, and transferred to a hospital in Milan for x-rays and treatment. This shift in setting sets the stage for the next plot component.

The second book in the story encompasses the rising action. At this point in the story, Henry is in the hospital in Milan where he is told that he must wait six months before undergoing surgery. Feeling as though this recovery time is far too long, he meets with another doctor who agrees to expedite the process. In the mean time, Catherine is also transferred to the Milan hospital. At this time, the pair's relationship becomes more serious and important to the story. Soon, the couple are deeply in love, and they spend most nights together. After many months, the time for Henry to return to the field approached. On one particular night, Catherine admits that she is three

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months pregnant, but insists that he should not worry on her behalf. The book ends with Henry on a train, returning to the front lines.

The climax of the story is contained within the third book. Upon his return to duty, Henry is instructed to go to the Bainsizza to take command of a fleet of ambulances. He spends the rest of the day catching up with old friends, and in the morning, sets off for his new command. The war is intensifying, and there are rumors that the Austrians have broken through the Italian lines. The next night, the Italian army begins to retreat, and Henry is instructed to leave the wounded soldiers and instead use the ambulances to carry hospital equipment. After spending hours on the road, stuck in an immobile caravan, Henry decides that if they are ever to make it to the fall back positions, the ambulances must take back roads. Almost to their destination, one of the ambulances gets stuck in the mud, and the group begins to hear bombing coming from the main road. Henry sees German soldiers and the group runs, although one soldier is shot in the process. Henry and the others spend the night in a barn. The next morning, they head for the Tagliamento River, and as they are crossing, a member of the police grabs Henry. He manages to escape by jumping into the river and eventually hopping a train. At the end of the book, he comes to the realization that he will not return to the army or see his comrades again, but comforts himself in imagining where he and Catherine will go once they are reunited.

Book Four follows the falling action of the story. The train drops Henry in Milan, where he changes into civilian clothing and learns that Catherine is in Stresa. In Stresa, the barman in Henry's hotel offers to help Henry track down Catherine. He succeeds and sets off for her hotel. Catherine is with <https://assignbuster.com/an-essay-on-the-narrative-structure-of-a-farewell-to-arms/>

Miss Ferguson. The three share a meal before Catherine joins Henry at his hotel for the evening. The couple realizes that they must flee to Switzerland. A few days pass and one night, the barman warns that Henry is to be arrested in the morning. Henry borrows his boat and sets off. They row all night before arriving in Switzerland, and when they do, Catherine and Henry are arrested. The couple conceals their true identity and are released. They decide to continue onto Montereux. This book concludes any lingering, major events and alludes to the final resolution of the story.

The fifth and final book of the narrative concludes in tragedy. Catherine and Henry spend many months together, happy, in Switzerland. As Catherine's due date approaches, they move closer to the hospital. Early one morning, Catherine goes into a painful labor, and requires gas to lessen the intensity. Eventually, the doctor decides that a cesarean section is necessary. Henry does not want to go into the operating room with Catherine, and beforehand, she confides that she feels broken and may die. Catherine delivers a baby boy, whom Henry has no interest in. A nurse explains to him that the baby was a stillborn, and when Henry returns to Catherine's room, he contemplates the finality and inevitability of death. The next morning, Catherine hemorrhages and fears she will die. She goes unconscious and continues hemorrhaging until she dies. Henry returns to her room to say goodbye, but finds little comfort in this. The story closes as he walks back to his hotel in the rain.

A Farewell to Arms follows a common narrative structure: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. He gives each component its own book, clarifying the plot and enhancing the story.

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