

Farewell to arms is a novel without hope

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Ernest Hemingway's novel 'A Farewell to Arms' shows the destitution of war and the hopelessness of life. Throughout times of hardship and despair, the need to believe in a better future is enhanced, and through the horrors of death and injury, Hemingway implies that all is hopeless. Attempts to find meaning through alcohol and sex proved unsuccessful, society's corruption highlights the absurdity of war, and the love Catherine and Henry felt for each other ended in horror. During the war, soldiers turned to the simple pleasures of life in a means finding hope and escaping the misery.

The constant drinking and journeys to "bawdy houses" shows the change in moral standards as the need for meaning in life rises, and the social norms change from modesty to going to the "whorehouse before it shuts" This lowered standards as a result of the soldiers' position leads the reader to understand that in war, there is no hope; the constant death and destruction leaves soldiers feeling as though they have no purpose in life. The routine death, to the point that a soldier dying is unimportant, shows the brutality of war on the emotions of men.

The positive connotations of "only seven thousand" soldiers dying highlights the hopelessness of life and the need for an outlet from war. While in normal circumstance one could turn to religion as an answer for the reason behind war and how to alleviate oneself from the terror, Henry and his friends believe "all thinking men are atheists", and interrupt the priest when he attempts to tell Henry about the Abbruzzi. This disruption of spirituality affirms Hemingway's belief in the falsehood of religion, and shows how in times of war, society changes itself and consequently, all hope of peace and happiness is lost.

Once Henry injures himself and is forced to take leave from the war, it is evident to the reader that the world is corrupt, and it drags everyone with it. While in the hospital immediately following his knee being “blown to bits”, Rinaldi tries to make Henry realise his sacrifice and accept the rewards that come with it. Despite Henry protesting that he was “blown up” not during battle, but when he was “eating cheese”, Rinaldi still believes that Henry could “get a silver” medal of honour.

Even though he knew that he had done nothing courageous or even brave, but was rather injured in the most banal way possible, Henry was still able to receive an award that was meant for those who had made a significant sacrifice in war. This medal was meant for the type of hero Hemingway believed in; one that displayed acts of courage, endurance and stoicism. Hemingway, through Henry, implies that he does not believe in the glorification of war, as he sees it as an incentive for people to continue fighting. This continuation of war only leads to more despair, and ultimately, a life devoid of hope and meaning. Much like in the hospital, at the races, Hemingway once again shows the reader the corruption of the world and the hopelessness that is brought about as a result of it. When Catherine and Henry realise that the race is corrupt and one horse is assured of victory, they decide to “pool” all their money together and back it. Although once they do not win as much as they hoped, their mindset towards cheating is reversed, and suddenly, Catherine “does not like this crooked” racing. It can be concluded that people don't care about the unauthenticity of life, as long as it benefits them.

Even Catherine, a woman used to balance Henry's faults and teach him lessons as a result of her loss, is dragged into the corruption of the world. These acts of corruption highlight the inability of man to act in a truly righteous way, and extinguish all hope of an honest society. While there is an overall feeling of hopelessness, some can be found in the relationship between Henry and Catherine. Their love inspires them to look towards the future, planning and hoping to "go somewhere" when "the war is over".

While the "many long nights in Milan" provided the couple with everlasting memories and hope for the future, the inevitable, and sudden, ending of their relationship further reinforces Hemingway's view of a hopeless society. The single emotion that can provide some sense of hope and prospect for the future inflicts more pain than any other as a result of the passion and intensity of love the couple felt for each other. When Henry hears the news of Catherine's haemorrhage and that the death of the woman he loves is imminent, he tries anything possible to end her pain, even turning to religion, a belief he had criticised on many occasions.

Even though he believed that he had "outlived (his) religious feeling", he pleaded with God to not "let her die". The repetition of this prayer allows the reader to see the maturity Henry has developed; he has turned from a man who was in a relationship purely because he wanted to "play the game", into someone with empathy and real care for a woman. The joy of "waking and not knowing who it was" with her had left him, and he had developed true affection for Catherine. The strong connection the couple shared made Catherine's death even more difficult, and reinforces the harsh view of

society that Hemingway believed. Death's winged chariot" took all that had meaning from Henry's life, and left him a "cracked" and "broken" man in a world that was 'cooked'. 'A Farewell to Arms' predominately presents a hopeless and cynical view of the war and life itself, but hope does appear as a result of the love between Henry and Catherine. Hope is seen as futile through the soldiers' actions, the corruption of the world, and the inevitable heartache as a result of Catherine's death and from this it is evident that the only bit of justice left in the world is love, assuming that it too is not dragged down by war.