

# LOVE IN *A FAREWELL TO ARMS*

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## I. Introduction

Several critics have stated that the novel *A Farewell to Arms* is a tragic romance; however, I wonder if the novel is really a tragedy. In *Ernest Hemingway*, Rovit and Brenner write: “[*A Farewell to Arms*] has been called among other things a ‘tragedy,’ an unconvincing romance, a masterful depiction of the impersonal cruelty of war.”<sup>1</sup> Rovit and Brenner’s criticism notes that the novel has two ways of grasping it: One is that the novel can be grasped as a tragedy; another is that the novel can be read as the depiction of the cruelty of war. But I could not assent to this criticism because it stated nothing but a general thesis. The reason why I thought they stated nothing but the general thesis is that I did not know how to define romantic tragedy (the novel is not at all *Romeo and Juliet*), and I thought that the novel was meaningless if it was merely the depiction of the cruelty of war.

When I read a critic about the novel in *A Short History of American Literature* (*Amerika Bungaku-sha Nyūmon*, edited by Kenji Inoue), I found love in *A Farewell to Arms* had such a complex meaning that nobody could declare in a word that the novel was a tragedy. The critic states that established criteria like sacred, glorious, and sacrifice become meaningless in inhuman warfare, and a man who believes in such idealism finds it difficult to follow his ideals and to live.<sup>2</sup> By reading this judgement, I thought the hero in *A Farewell to Arms* had the attitude that love was his purpose in living instead of sacredness, glory, sacrifice. I think the reason why Henry tried to escape from several dangers was that he loved Catherine. I feel as if love was his religion. Certainly, in the novel, there are some scenes in which Henry discusses religion with the priest and Count Greffi. Therefore, I cannot merely say the novel is only a tragic romance.

I find the meaning of love in the novel has three elements. First of all, one

element is sexual love as a game. In the beginning of the novel, Henry does not fall in love with Catherine; he chooses her as a sexual object to satisfy his lust, and he plays "a rotten game" with her, so says Catherine(29).\*

The next element is sexual love as real love. When Henry falls in love with Catherine at the hospital in Milan, they have a love affair in the hospital. Still, Henry and Catherine's love is sexual; however, I want to examine, with the definition of love by the priest, if their love is real love.

The third and most important element is religious love. Of course, Henry does not love God or is afraid of God, but when he discusses with the priest and Count Greffi about religion, he begins to become aware of religious feeling. Perhaps his religious feeling is his love for Catherine.

I believe Henry's love is one that develops over a long period of time.

## II. Sexual love as a game

The critic William A. Glasser has a theory that Henry is a sensualist: "The first point to establish about Frederic's development...is that he remains a selfish sensualist, not only in the beginning, but throughout the book, almost to the very end."<sup>3</sup> Glasser concludes that Henry is a sensualist from the beginning of the novel almost to the end. But I feel Glasser is mistaken. His theory avoids Henry's development. Certainly, in the beginning of the novel, Henry's life is sensualistic; however, I can see Henry's sensualism is over long before the end of the novel.

In the beginning of the novel, the novel contains a scene to suggest that Henry is a sensualist. The novel begins with the officers' dirty jokes in the mess toward the priest, and another example of Henry's sensualism is that Henry has two choices by which to spend his leave. Henry is urged by the priest to go to Abruzzi, the priest's homeland, and is urged by the officers to visit whorehouses. Henry's choice, according to Robert W. Lewis in *A FAREWELL TO ARMS: A War of the Words*, "is foreshadowed by his saying goodnight to the priest and going with the captain to the officers' whorehouse."<sup>4</sup>

The evidence to establish Lewis's comment is in Henry's narration. In chapter 3, Henry makes excuses to the priest about his leave and not going to Abruzzi. In Henry's mind he remembers: "[I had gone] to the smoke of cafes and nights when the room whirled and you needed to look at the wall to make it stop, nights in bed, drunk, when you knew that that was all there was, and the strange excitement of waking and not knowing who it was with you, and the world all unreal in the dark"(13). In Henry's narration, we can see Henry had gone to whorehouses on his leave. When Henry returned from his leave, he tells Rinaldi: "I went everywhere"

\*All the writer's quotations in *A Farewell to Arms* are taken from Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (Cheshire: Arrow Books, 1994); the page references appear in parentheses in the text.

(11); however, Henry does not go everywhere but only to whorehouses.

Although Henry had sex with whores, they made no sense on the design of his person. As Rovit and Brenner note, "the character of selfness of Frederic Henry we meet at the beginning of the novel is practically nonexistent."<sup>5</sup> As Henry narrates, "the excitement of waking and not knowing who it was with you...that you must resume again unknowing and not caring in the night, sure that this was all and all and all and not caring" (13), so to have sex with whores in whorehouses is meaningless and not significant for Henry.

After Henry's leave, he meets Catherine. Henry plays a sexual game with Catherine as his sexual object, and Catherine's only significance is to satisfy Henry's lust. But in chapter 5, when Henry tried to kiss Catherine, she slapped his face and said, "I just couldn't stand the nurse's-evening-off aspect of it" (24). This means, so to speak, Catherine does not want Henry to think of her as a whore. Also in chapter 23, she says in the hotel in Milan, "I never felt like a whore before" (137). Therefore, Catherine is not a sensualist.

But Henry's sexual game with Catherine is significant to see the characteristic of Henry's selfish sensualism. In chapter 6, Henry explains: "This was a game, like bridge, in which you said things instead of playing cards" (29); however, a game is using not only words but physical actions. In chapter 5, Henry puts his arm under Catherine's arm and tries to kiss her, and in chapter 6, he demands a kiss from her selfishly even though she rejects kissing him. As James Phelan states, Henry's not-caringness as he confesses, "I did not care what I was getting into," (29) shows him to be "not only extremely selfish but also woefully inadequate in [his] understanding of Catherine."<sup>6</sup> Still for Henry, the sexual game he plays with Catherine is "better than going every evening to the house for officers" (29). Therefore, Henry's sexual love as a game shows to us the characteristic of his selfish sensualism.

### III. Sexual love as real love

But when Henry met Catherine again in the hospital in Milan, he fell in love with her. Henry states: "When I saw her I was in love with her. Everything turned over inside of me" (84). Yet as Glasser suggests, if one merely accepts what Henry says is true, it may be misunderstood. And if one decides what Henry says is true, "One must look more closely at how the feeling arose in Frederic."<sup>7</sup> To examine Glasser's idea, we must look at the scene in which Henry fulfills the priest's definition of love: "When you love you wish to do things for. You wish to sacrifice for. You wish to serve" (66). Consequently, I still cannot see Henry's real love for Catherine except for telling himself that he is in love with her. Henry continues to demand Catherine's body but does not wish to do things for her.

On the other hand, I can see Catherine's love for Henry as real love. In the hospital in Milan, her love for him fulfills the priest's definition of love: "I want

what you want. There isn't any me any more. Just what you want'" (96). As Glasser states in his criticism, Catherine's love for Henry in chapter 16 fulfills the priest's definition of love, for "in doing so she presents [Henry] with a choice."<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Catherine fulfills the priest's definition of love by doing what Henry wants her to do. I can conclude Catherine's love for Henry is real love.

But even though Henry said he was in love with Catherine, his love for her is still only sexual. From the scene in chapter 14 when Henry meets Catherine again to the scene in which Catherine goes to Henry's bed in chapter 16, I cannot see anything Henry does for Catherine or sacrifices for her. She alone serves him.

But when I read the scene at the hospital in Milan in chapter 17, I can interpret it that Henry is beginning to move toward the priest's definition of love. In chapter 17, when Miss Ferguson advised Henry to give Catherine just a little rest because she was getting very tired, Henry called Miss Gage and asked her to let Catherine go off night duty for a while. This means that Henry wanted Catherine to take a rest because he was worrying about her physical condition. If Henry was really selfish, he would want to see Catherine without minding about her exhaustion. Therefore, I can now say Henry's love for Catherine is on the way to being real love.

#### IV. Religious love

The novel is a religious book, as Robert Penn Warren believes, for even though the novel is not interpreted religiously, the novel is "conditioned by [a] religious problem."<sup>9</sup> The novel is generally well-known as a love story or the depiction of cruelty of war; however, we must pay attention to the discussion about religion between Henry and the priest and Henry and Count Greffi.

First of all, I have to mention the relationship between Henry and the priest. What I must mention is the "essential difference between [Henry and the priest]" which Lewis notes.<sup>10</sup> The priest points out Henry's secular love by contradicting Henry: "'What you tell me about in the nights. That is not love. That is only passion and lust'" (66), for the priest defines love as follows: "'When you love you wish to do things for. You wish to sacrifice for. You wish to serve'" (66). The priest is really telling Henry about Divine Love. Then Henry asks the priest if a man loving a woman fulfills the priest's definition of love. The essential difference between Henry and the priest, which Lewis talked about, is that Henry is symbolized as secular love and the priest is symbolized as Divine Love. But at the point when Henry asks the priest about loving a woman, we can foreshadow that Henry will love someone, and we can see Henry's awakening to religion.

Next, I have to discuss the scene between Henry and Count Greffi. In the conversation between Henry and Count Greffi in chapter 35, I can see change in Henry's character from the earlier time when he said to the priest in chapter 11

that Henry did not love God. One of the differences is that when Count Greffi asked Henry “‘What do you value most?’”(232), Henry answered, “‘Some one I love’”(232). In short, Henry asserts what he values most is someone he loves, of course Catherine. Another difference is that Henry confesses to Count Greffi: “‘I might become very devout. ...I will pray for you’”(233). I wonder if Henry, who says he does not believe in God in chapter 11, may not eventually become devout and pray.

I must note what happened to Henry to substantiate such a change in Henry.

When Henry escaped from the carabinieri and dived into the river, he was baptized. Glasser’s comment is that Henry “has become Christian by being defeated.”<sup>11</sup> Henry says in chapter 32: “Anger was washed away in the river along with any obligation. ...It was no point of honor. I was not against [my uniform and officer’s stars]. I was through”(208). When Henry pulled off his uniform, he stopped fighting and became a Christian, a lonesome devout man. Malcolm Cowley, according to Warren, has pointed out that “the plunge into the flooded Tagliamento, when *Frederick [sic]* escapes from the battle police, has the significance of a rite. By this ‘baptism’ *Frederick [sic]* is reborn into another world; he comes out into the world of the man alone, no longer supported by and involved in society.”<sup>12</sup>

I can say Henry becomes devout at the end of the novel. In chapter 35, at the billiard room in the hotel in Stresa, Count Greffi asks Henry: “‘[I]f you ever become devout pray for me if I am dead’”(233). This suggests praying for someone is being devout. At the end of the novel when Catherine is dying, Henry prays for her: “Oh, God, please don’t let her die. I’ll do anything for you if you won’t let her die. Please, please, please, dear God, don’t let her die”(292). We can see Henry becomes devout at the end of the novel, for he confessed to Count Greffi, “‘I might become very devout’”(233).

## V. Conclusion

*A Farewell to Arms* has many words which refer to sex and religion. I mentioned them in each section in this paper. As I pointed out in the Introduction, I think the fundamental theme of the novel is on religion. The key for this assertion is in the title of the novel.

As for the title of the novel, Rovit and Brenner make the following comment: “[A]s a final gloss on the novel, we may find a small substantiation in the title. A FAREWELL TO ARMS is beautifully ambiguous in two obvious realms: the farewell to war in the separate peace, the farewell to the beloved in death. But it also may suggest a farewell to those arms that the early Frederic Henry had opposed in the world: a farewell to ‘not-caringness’ that gives a death-in-life to which no one can resign himself.”<sup>13</sup>

Certainly, we may interpret the title as a farewell to war or a farewell to

Henry's love, Catherine. But if I approve the latter—a farewell to Henry's love, Catherine—the novel may become tragic, and I could not claim in my paper that the novel is religious. I do believe Hemingway did not include in the title a farewell to religion.

In chapter 27, after Henry talks with Gino, an Italian ambulance driver under Henry's command, Henry thinks: "I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice and the expression in vain...and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates"(165). Words like sacred, glorious, and sacrifice mean war; they are dirty, and they mean much less than the names of villages, roads, rivers, and the numbers of regiments and the dates. As for killing persons in war, Henry could not find any values in fighting in words like sacred, glorious, and sacrifice. Henry could only believe in concrete things.

But by escaping from war and abandoning fighting, Henry gained religion. This religion is his love for Catherine. As I mentioned religious love in the third section in this paper, is it too much to say that all the meaning of the title of the novel comes together in the scene in which Henry dived into the river and was baptized? Henry found the purpose of living in the religion of love for Catherine. Even though Catherine died, his faith to live on is the religion of love for Catherine. As Ben Stoltzfus suggests: "If Frederic begins writing his story immediately after Catherine's death...Frederic needs to understand why she has died and what has happened to him, and in writing the story of their love (she is still too much with him; he cannot dissociate himself from her) Hemingway invites the reader's participation in deciphering Frederic's motives and feelings."<sup>14</sup>

I conclude that Henry's love for Catherine in *A Farewell to Arms* is his religion; Henry decided to live for his religion, for his love, Catherine Barkley.

## Endnotes

1. Earl Rovit and Gerry Brenner, *Ernest Hemingway* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), p.81.
2. "Kodo no Bungaku—Hemingway," *Amerika Bungaku-shi Nyūmon*, Kenji Inoue, ed. (Osaka: Sōgen-sha, 1995), p.115.
3. William A. Glasser, "A Farewell to Arms," *The Sewanee Review*, 24, No.2 (1966), 458.
4. Robert W. Lewis, *A Farewell to Arms: A War of the Words* (New York: Twayne, 1992), p.33.
5. Rovit and Brenner, p.33.
6. James Phelan, "Distance, Voice, and Temporal Perspective in Fredric Henry's Narration: Successes, Problems, and Paradox" in *New Essays on A FAREWELL TO ARMS*, Scott Donaldson, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.58.
7. Glasser, p.459.
8. Glasser, p.458.
9. Robert Penn Warren, "Ernest Hemingway" in *Modern Critical Views: Ernest Hemingway*, Harold Bloom, ed. (New York: Chelsea House, 1985), p.54.
10. Lewis, p.67.
11. Glasser, p.465.
12. Warren, pp.58-9.
13. Rovit and Brenner, p.89.
14. Ben Stoltzfus, "A Sliding Discourse: The Language of *A Farewell to Arms*" in *New Essays on A FAREWELL TO ARMS*, Scott Donaldson, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.120.

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(卒論指導教員 Sanford Goldstein)