

# MASCULINITY AND GENDER IN A FAREWELL TO ARMS

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## Abstract:

The present paper critically analyses the gender and masculinity expression and interaction in Hemingway's most popular novel, A Farewell to Arms. The researcher after going through many novels chosen the novel A Farewell to Arms as Hemingway wrote in detail about gender and masculinity and gender role in the novel. This is the first book of the author that made him popular in the society since it was based on the true story that replicates the World War I. This novel is otherwise termed as an antiwar novel. Considering the main aspect of the novel's gender issues and stress of masculinity interaction induced the writing of this paper.

**Keywords:** World War I, Love, Gender Interaction, Masculine Identity

## Introduction

Ernest Hemingway (1899 – 1961) occupies an indelible place in the chronicles of American Literary history by virtue of his unique writing style and narration that presents a vivid picture of the scenarios explained in the novel by presenting a realistic depiction of the inter-war period, Hemingway has presented the quandary of the modern man in “a world which increasingly seeks to reduce him to a mechanism, a mere thing” (Brooks, Cleanth). Written in a simple but unconventional style, with the problems of war, violence and death as underlining themes, his novels present a figurative interpretation of life.

## Overview of the novel

Recap of different aspects of the novel of Ernest Hemingway's 'A Farewell to Arms'. It is a love story which occurs during World War I with commentary on social issues and directs the reader on to previous incidents. Hemingway acquired direct and complete information on how the war would be through his involvement in the battle. The battle of the kind in the World War I was not been experienced before.

Masculinity can be witnessed as battling before “The Great War”. Nevertheless, an increase in the execution of men became shocking during the Great War. Traditional norms were not followed and the level of dignity was too low.

The statement of Brain Bond in his book “War and Society in Europe 1870 – 1970” represent it”

“The Great War... quickly acquired the reputation as the most terrible of all modern conflicts and retains it in spite of all the horrors that have occurred since. Around 10 million men died as a direct consequence of combat and perhaps as many more from indirect effects. Whole nations had been subjected to the hardships associated with a prolonged siege... great dynasties had been overthrown... destroying social and political certainties” (Montgomery-Pool, 1).

Countries and societies were severely damaged. Also, an increase in the number of men taking part in the battle made women take up the roles played by men equally. The story revolves around these circumstances in Hemingway’s book; he also mentions about the love affair of an American Frederic Henry who worked in ambulance unit of Italy with Catherine Barkley and his friendship with Rinaldi or “War brother”. The confusing and foolish incidents which are seen in this book exactly replicate the kind of the world in which Hemingway lived. *A Farewell to Arms* narrates the people’s life after World War I in which perception of humans on the world is taken a step back where they raised queries on social rules, behaviour of sexual relationship between two genders that has been approved socially.

The present paper critically views the depiction of masculinity and gender interactions within the writing of Hemingway in order to know the positive and negative views of different authors towards masculinity and gender interaction problem in the chosen novel. *A Farewell to Arms* makes the audience to clearly catch up with the idea in the book and also makes them connect this with their real-time scenario.

## **2. Hemingway’s Masculinity in *A Farewell to Arms***

Among the reviewer’s thought towards this novel, one of the main theme attaining higher reviews in both positive and negative in terms of Masculinity. Masculinity is basically the thought of possession of qualities which is traditionally related to men.

There are numerous writers’ shared different perspectives and critics in the novel of *A Farewell to Arms* that concentrates and comprises the group of concepts of masculinity. The plot is completely male-oriented which includes work carried out by men, the typical task of men like battling, preying and combat (Rashid, 75). Given the evidence to this, the argument delivered by Assemi et al. (40) in the year of 1960 – 70’ after thirty years of the novel publication where the women liberationist were shocked by the ideology of anti-feminist characters in Hemingway’s book. This shows the negative opinion towards Hemingway’s novel in terms of masculinity. According to the author like Bakheet and Ismail (51) shared that the new meaning has been given to the characters of Lieutenant Fredric Henry and Rinaldi and it helped to reshape the ideas of feminism and Masculism with their literal meaning was first destructed and defined once again. This statement also described the prevailing negative opinion of masculinity in the farewell novel. Philosophers who study masculinity and femininity evaluated the novel again criteria dealing with feminism and Masculism (Abe, 30). According to the view of the battlefield, it is a place where almost everywhere is filled with masculine and no women can be seen and it is the only place to truly test the bravery of any men during the real fight. Therefore, by considering the *Farewell to Arms* / Hemingway’s notorious masculinity, the novel title looks

little strange as it denotes flight from a battlefield. The critical opinions of Farewell's / Hemingway's masculinity and the meaning of the title are in contrast with each other and explains that this novel is not as we think it contains many issues related to gender (Assadnassab, 21; Brian and Trent, 36). The idea about masculinity which Henry had in his mind is ceremony, braveness and responsibility but while comparing all these with soldiers everything looks like a contrast. After detaching his thoughts from the battlefield, his decision about femininity and masculinity are completely opposite to one another. The failure of masculinity is stressed by Charles Hatten and he stated as, "in World War I, the masculine experience of war was itself so transformed by technology as to overwhelm notions of war as a site of individual masculine achievement" (Hatten, 80).

Judith Fetterley, a women liberationist reviewer has explained the anti-feminist nature of Frederic Henry as "real definition of a good woman... is she who knows what she exists for and does it and lets you know she likes it" (Fetterley, 198). Fetterley started her criticism about the aspects of gender and feminism in the novel attacking the overall conservative views on the characters of men and women throughout the book but soon they shifted their thought after understanding the initial role depicted by Frederic and Catherine in the novel. This new thought facilitated seeing Catherine as a bold. Catherine and Frederic are equivalent. He cannot be posited higher than her. These views were given by Fetterley specified that the novel covers both gender and masculinity perspective. The critic of Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (32) expressed that Western Culture has historically privileged masculinity at the expense of the feminine, creating a hierarchy of gender in which the masculine value is positive and the feminine negative explained his thought on how feminism is played down western culture' history clearly shows.

Rinaldi considers that it is not enough who consider masculinity is not alone involved in conflicts when they are particular reason at the same time it is important action needed to harm anyone when they are asked to do so in spite the fact the person you are fighting is not all an assailant (West, 112). These expressions in the novel depict the expression of masculinity nature within the novel. As per the positive note provided by (Hatten, 76) towards Masculinity in "A Farewell to Arms" as ideology of masculinity in nineteenth-century highlighted that the essential aspect of masculinity is self-determination and male children are naturally encouraged by parents and famous books to take part in abusive activities, being fearless becomes one of the important characteristics of masculinity where they take control of the external world and themselves Lieutenant Henry agrees to the meaning given in the book right away where he is no more supporting the pastor which he used to do before on multiple occasions. This Hatten view highlights the masculinity nature in general, from this, it is cleared that the novel clearly presents the masculinity in the novel hero. Further, the novel presents the main idea behind the conversation that took place between Rinaldi and the pastor deals with braveness to get involved in conflicts and also to take part in the battle which was the fundamental responsibility (Baker, 122). This can be possibly guesstimated as a biographical statement of Hemingway's life at the same time all the characters in this novel should not be linked with the writer's personal life. Similar to this view, most of the reviewers at first read *A Farewell to Arms* with the perception of a biography of Hemingway by claiming that the majority of the incidents narrated in the book are related to his real-life experience during his visit to Italy (Rashid. 117). T.S. Eliot in 1993 gave his view on the book as "Hemingway is a writer for whom I have considerable respect; he seems

to me to tell the truth about his own feelings at the moment they exist” (Rovit and Waldhorn, 99). The honesty of Hemingway was highly appreciated and also he asked the book reviewers not to criticize Hemingway’s book in autobiographical perspective but look at it as just a literary work. The point of view suggested by Eliot made the reviewers to read it again by changing their thought that it is not related to the author’s life.

### **3. Hemingway’s gender and A Farewell to Arms**

Generally, the writing of Hemingway highlights the feminine and masculinity interaction to the world, i.e. how the females are treated in the world, what is the difference in treatment meted out to both men and women in the society? How females are respected by men in the workplace and family life etc. The reason for such highlights of gender in Heming’s work specifies how the women’s position in that society was different and received less respect than men. While considering the gender issue, it is noticed that Hemingway was born at a time where the women’s positions went under many major variations. His work usually emphasizes the gender problems that are required to examine the immediate socio-cultural milieu. This leads to getting so many positive and negative criticism from various eminent authors. On reaching his early manhood days, there was a struggle between the female and the male over political power, sexual freedom, economic independence and personal freedom (Torma, 38). All these struggles examined the naturalization and justification of many cruelties against women and the concept of “learning to live with what you are born with” (Wakoski, 11). In his popular novel, *A Farewell to arms*, Hemingway also specified the gender role, how world shows gender difference during the war and the role of the female in society etc. Catherine has developed an independent and modern young women team representing Hemingway’s Norm Woman. She is an advanced modern version of new women. Truth to be told, Catherine is a good friend and sport that possess the traditional domestic and maternal qualities where the mannishness or cruelties are portrayed in a strong women character in the later fiction of Hemingway (Recla, 28). This author has mentioned the gender prediction of Catherine and Hemingway in this novel and critiques the positive view of the representation of these two genders. However, the critic from Leslie Fielder where men in Hemingway’s novel choose one another’s company and the dangers of the manly world and responsibilities that are related to the civilization and women (Fiedler, 355), the protagonist of this novel flees from the untrustworthy and corrupted male world into the arms of women. These two authors view represent the male and female presentation in Hemingway’s novel. More specifically, Hemingway represents the novel’s heroine as more competent and self-reliant than Henry (Novelli, 22). This depicts the gender variation presented in *A Farewell to Arms*.

According to the perception of Prabha (127) study, it is described that while introducing to Catherine Henry is ready to even cheat for conquest and once Catherine sees over his game and insists honesty, she is building the ethical terms for a relationship which will turn as a private retreat from deceptive lawless world. This represents the nature of female in presenting their honesty than male at the time of war. Even men adopts ethical standard in each and every stage of life but here when compared to Catherine, Henry has less ethical view. This represents the gender variation and interaction in Heming’s writing. After publishing the novel, totally a new Hemingway was born and a man of exaggerated masculine and virility knowledge (Prescott,

176). By seeing this, it is understood that this newly emerged Hemingway was the author's defensive response to what he saw was a general conquest of women. He has discovered this conquest both in his personal and social life in large scale. For an example, he thought that his father's suicide was a result of his mother's bullying actions against his father's lack of ability for confronting with us (Kennedy, 187). Linda Wagner recommends in (Donaldson, 76) work, that it is the first point where Hemingway as stopped having trust in the magic of a true love between woman and a man. At this time his first marriage with Hadley was terminated and married Pauline for the second time. After many years Hemingway believed that only these events forced his dad to attempt suicide (Selected Letters 670). This view also presents how gender variation and representation occurs in novels of Hemingway. There are some other authors who also viewed the difference in feminism thought of Heming in his novel (Young, 15; Baker, 438). Inside the world of literary, Hemingway was one among of the leading male authors who expressed his honest feeling for women in this planet. From the authors' point of view, Hemingway was mostly in defensive and practiced antagonism towards the women because they often competed with their counterparts.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Based on the critics review of the novel, it is observed that the gender and masculinity expression of Hemingway was appreciated by group of eminent authors and some others shared their negative views towards the gender and masculinity. Overall this showed mixed views among reviewers. It is further observed that Ernest Hemingway was known for his dominated audacity and his determination to discover the constituent of the masculine condition. For writing, he used the past, recollecting memories of his youth to empower himself in an extensive literary world. He created Frederic Henry whose role was that of an ambulance driver on the Italian front during the First World War and organized a complicated love story, constituting masculine identity, and gender interaction. Hence the current paper involves deep analysis of the story of *Farewell to Arms* with masculine identity and gender interaction. The critical paper helps the reader to comprehend the inner workings of the novel along with masculinity and gender presentation in the Hemingway's writing.

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