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Ernest Miller Hemingway's Antiwar Legacy in a Farewell to Arms and the Sun Also Rises

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ABSTRACT

Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899-1961) is one of the influential modern American writers who actively participated in World War I. He belongs to the Lost Generation group of writers who were particularly concerned with the brutality and nothingness of war and the aftermath of war especially the effects of war on the war survivors. His *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) were produced against the background of World War I. Accordingly; this study wants to read these two texts to find out the anti-war legacy that is still relevant in the contemporary world. This article argues that these texts generate anti-war legacy through dissemination of anti-war discourse and exposing the vacuum of warring myth.

Keywords: *Hemingway, World War I, anti-war legacy, warring myth, Lost Generation, alienation, disillusionment.*

Introduction

“No American writer is more associated with writing about war in the early 20th century than Ernest Hemingway. He experienced it firsthand, wrote dispatches from innumerable frontlines, and used war as a backdrop for many of his most memorable works.”¹

One of the most well-known and significant writers of the modern era in America is Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899–1961). He was a journalist and one of the writers from the Lost Generation group of writers. This legendary author rose to fame for his understated style and uncomplicated writing. The majority of the inspiration for the author's novels and short tales comes from his own experiences, and his writings have had a significant impact on his life and his readers. He participated World War I and produced his own experience which provided a realistic touch to his writings. He presented atrocities, futility, nothingness of war. He also presented the aftermath of war among the people who survived the disastrous period of war. He very minutely presented people's assumptions about the world, life, religion, and social order that have been called into question after the war. He pushed the recognition of the atrocities of war and their lasting psychological effects on the public consciousness and brilliantly conveyed in stories and novels the unsettling reality of his time.

Hemingway “fundamentally changed the way we think about or write about war.” After experiencing the First World War, Hemingway, unlike other classic war writers, produced the unromantic version of war by presenting disillusionment of heroic feelings in war, the psychological trauma, the mind-numbing horror of war, and the destruction of a generation of man. He questioned the idealistic and widely held belief that conflict leads to a tranquil

afterlife. As its title suggests, *A Farewell to Arms* is essentially an antiwar novel. It opposed the senseless killing, massive destruction, and total absurdity of war. It also criticizes the horrific disturbance of the lives of survivors and the psychological damage that war does to people in general. The novel makes the argument that ideas like success and failure in the face of such calamity are meaningless. The novel *The Sun Also Rises* examines the psychological effects of war on individuals by portraying the attitudes, sentiments, behaviors, and moods of a hard-drinking and fast-living gang in postwar Spain and France.ⁱⁱ

Many writers responded to the end of World War I by writing about their experiences and troubling ideas. As a war veteran, Hemingway powerfully conveyed his opposition to war in his works, leaving a lasting legacy. This essay presents Hemingway's anti-war legacy through the analysis of the warring myths that are exposed and the anti-war discourse that is generated by the books *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Sun Also Rises*. In doing so, this paper focused on the mind-numbing horror of war; disillusionment, alienation, inertia and identity crisis; masculine insecurity; the characters' states of faith; physical and psychological suffering; and, most importantly, the nonchalant qualities of the Lost Generation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For better comprehension, the research method encompassed thematic analysis, close reading, textual analysis, content analysis of materials. This research frequently works with explanations of the connotation and social, political, and cultural context of the literary text. Upon identification objects from the fiction, non-fiction articles, and other illustrations, each object was coded for preliminary themes. After categorizing all these, conceptual themes were designed. Textual analysis method is used to form comprehensive arguments. Relevant examples have been taken from the studied items and organized in order to bring evidence for the claim of the article. Pertinent literatures are minutely evaluated to support the themes.

BACKGROUND

Young people joined in large numbers, chasing the myth of wartime glory, oblivious to the deadly side effects of conflict. Before the United States entered World War I, a large number of Americans volunteered to join the allied side. Hemingway is one of these volunteers who enlisted in the American Red Cross ambulance service in Italy during World War I. He was troubled by the horrors of World War I since more people died there than in any other conflict in history, partly due to the use of cutting-edge weapons and technologies by the military, such as flamethrowers, tanks, airplanes, submarines, machine guns, and modern artillery.ⁱⁱⁱ Millions of people died in the Great War, too many to be buried. The broken, bloated, and fractured bodies that filled the war's wastelands provided the cold for the horrific reenactment of the Great War that has been traumatized time and time again since 1918.^{iv} During this dark period, two crore people lost their lives and many were injured. There were around 10 million innocent citizens and 9.7 million military persons among them.

People's assumptions about the world, life, religion, and social order have been called into question after the war. In contrast to the idealistic and widely held belief that conflict leads to a tranquil afterlife, the fortunate survivors of 1920 were deeply frustrated by the plethora of unforeseen events that befell them. From the outset of the horrific war, ordinary people were contemplating the outcome. The Great War, which broke out on July 28, 1914, was supposed to end by Christmas of that same year, but it didn't end until November 11, 1918.^v Many conversations on World War I occurred both during and after the conflict, with some people supporting and others opposing it. The anti-war discourse of that era was inspired by the works of war hero Ernest Hemingway among others. Hemingway's books *The Sun Also Rises*

and *A Farewell to Arms* in particular helped to spark anti-war rhetoric by revealing the thoughts that the common people during that trying period had. He was also one of the harbingers of peace of that time because of his anti-war feeling, his writings' expression of the futility and nothingness of conflict, and his characters' desire for a peaceful existence.

ANTI-WAR POSTURE OF THE TWO NOVELS

Both the novels spoke the way people of that hard time of 1920 were speaking. People were assessing the loss and gain of the war, though there was no gain. In many respects, *A Farewell to Arms* is an antiwar book. Each of the five books in the novel contains clues that suggest Ernest Hemingway intended it to be a critique of war. It was a terrible conflict with no winners in World War One; "War is not won by victory" (47).^{vi} It is against the heedless bloodshed, catastrophic devastation, and utter senselessness of war. It also critiques the terrible disruption of survivors' lives and the psychological harm that war causes to both individuals and populations. The novel suggests that concepts like victory and defeat are worthless in the face of such catastrophe.^{vii} In contrast to many books that exalt bravery in combat, *A Farewell to Arms* makes an effort to depict a horrifying conflict as realistically as possible. The book opposed war and promoted peace by portraying the animosity and carnage of World War I. The protagonist and narrator of the novel, Lieutenant Frederic Henry, goes through the devastation, misery, and disillusionment of war. However, Henry also feels a deep love; this contradiction, ironically, highlights the pointlessness and annoyance that both the soldiers and the civilians suffer.^{viii} With the passage of time of the war, most of the characters express ambivalent or nuanced views about war. Frederic's views on war also become more ambivalent over time. And it is clearly stated in the following quotation:

"There is nothing as bad as war. . . . When people realize how bad it is they cannot do anything to stop it because they go crazy. There are some people who never realize. There are people who are afraid of their officers. It is with them the war is made."^{ix}

Another time, an American infantryman serving on the Italian front expresses to Henry his opinions regarding the conflict twice in one conversation:

"I say it's rotten. Jesus Christ, I say it's rotten."

There is plethora of talks like this where the protagonist Henry and other characters expressed their views of the nothingness and futility of war. At one point, Frederic leaves the army after running afoul of some stupid military police. He declares, "I would like to have had the uniform off although I did not care much about the outward forms. . . . I was through. I wished them all the luck. There were the good ones, and the brave ones, and the calm ones and the sensible ones, and they deserved it. But it was not my show any more [.]"

Finally, in book five, Henry and Catherine escaped to Switzerland from the undefined agony of war. Henry's journey was arduous and unpleasant, yet he never lost hope or yearned for the start of a new, calm existence, a separate peace. Hemingway does, however, illustrate the devastating nature of war when, near the book's conclusion, Henry loses both Cathrine and the infant, proving that it is not only senseless and silly but also cruel.^x

The Sun Also Rises doesn't contain any graphic fighting sequences, but the Lost Generation's lives are nevertheless marked by the aftermath of World War I.^{xi} Characters that have lost hope in life and become aimless, restless, sleepless, and disillusioned with the world demonstrate the influence of war. The majority of the characters were psychologically and

physically ill due to battle stress. They spend most of their time in bars drinking, smoking, and exploring Europe in an attempt to deal with their trauma. In the course of the main protagonists' quest for wisdom, the book depicts a series of strained and dysfunctional relationships that set off a domino effect of improper behavior that was common in Paris in the early 1920s and after World War I. They faced new challenges and horrors that hadn't been previously anticipated.^{xii}

THE VACUUM OF WARRING MYTH

In ancient battle stories, chants, and romantic notions, battle is associated with valor, heroism, and manhood. The great poets, such as Virgil in *The Aeneid* and Homer in *The Iliad*, built a fantasy. In *The Iliad*, Homer defends and exalts battle in order to emphasize the value of honor and dignity for warriors, the universality of war in human civilization, and the idea that war is the path to a peaceful afterlife. It gave young people in later generations the motivation to fight. This was also the case at the beginning of the twentieth century, particularly in the years preceding the two World Wars, when the majority of Europeans thought that fighting was a noble effort. They were inspired and made proud as they joined the cry of the Motherland/Fatherland. Adolescents are exposed to idealized portrayals of battle, encompassing military prowess, bravery, honor, dignity, and fictitious nationalism. Attracted by the comforting illusions and grandiose rhetoric of "war fantasy," millions of idealistic men poured onto the battlefield. But the brutal reality of World War I soon set in, and the heroic deeds of the past were horribly replaced by a desperate need to survive and a fierce drive to succeed.^{xiii} As the war went on, they saw their friends either die or be permanently wounded. Even after the war, the survivors are disillusioned, alienated and lost all peace of life. They were all dubbed "The Lost Generation." The warriors can clearly see that the war was a deception, and the myth has vanished, turning the idea of manliness and, most importantly, immortality into a nightmare. Thus, the gap between the promise and fulfillment was massive. Hemingway very successfully delineated the vacuum of warring myth in his premier novel *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*.

Similar to the warlords of antiquity, the leaders of the Great War propagated ideas of national grandeur and allegiance through idealistic, patriotic, and poetic speech. Millions of people, including Hemingway, joined the war effort with the hopes of achieving immortality, honor, dignity, bravery, chivalry, and heroic glory. However, it was all in vain. The myth, the battling fantasy, was destroyed by the reality of war. They soon encountered brutality, animalism, bloodshed, crime against humanity, barbarism, and many other such things. Hemingway illustrated the pointlessness of war in *A Farewell to Arms* by portraying his characters as hopeless and alienated, devoid of faith in God, people, or any conventional institution. They also suffered from identity crises and inertia, and instead of seeking glory and honor in battle, they traumatized themselves and fled the conflict. He used satire to illustrate how devastating war can be. Hemingway depicted the Lost Generation in *The Sun Also Rises*, describing how they were all severely affected by disillusionment, apathy, and identity crises and leading shallow, hedonistic lives after the war left them entirely wrecked.^{xiv}

DISILLUSINMENT AND ALIENATION

The twentieth century has been described by numerous writers as a period of total estrangement, death, despair, and disillusionment. The greatest material, spiritual, and moral destruction in history, World War I, was a major contributing factor to the alienation of this century. Hemingway's first book, *The Sun Also Rises*, deftly and elegantly examines the idea of estrangement. It is a real tale of pessimism, nihilism, aimlessness, and above all

alienation.^{xv} Every character in this book the members of the Lost Generation is estranged and dejected. Hemingway uses Jake Barnes, the protagonist and representative of the Lost Generation, as a lens through which to look at the story's underlying sense of disillusionment.^{xvi} He was physically maimed in the conflict. He is unable to make love to his favorite Brett as a result. And despite his continued hectic schedule, which helps him forget the pain, this made him feel isolated. Like Jake Barnes, Brett Ashley has experienced estrangement and the effects of World War I. She turns to alcohol and promiscuity in an attempt to find fulfillment because she feels alone or alienated. Cohn is a religious minority member and a Jew. Ultimately, this means that he is also estranged. Romero and Mike, among other characters, are also experiencing isolation. Henry, the main character in *A Farewell to Arms*, feels isolated and demoralized. Frederic, the main character, was restless and experiencing an identity crisis, which made it difficult for him to stay in his native country. He also fled the army, which he had joined in the hopes of discovering life's meaning and purpose after his wartime illusions ended. However, when he lost Catherine to bleeding to death, he felt betrayed and alienated.^{xvii} This is how Hemingway captured the existential crisis and profound sense of disillusionment that the post World War – I faced. So, the warring myth of peaceful life after the war usually did not take place. The War left the world empty, barren wasteland.

LOSS OF FAITH IN GOD OR IN TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Long-held ideals in love, loyalty, morality, faith in God, and conventional institutions were broken by the war, which also made people establish new standards for human sinfulness and brutality that was so ruthlessly witnessed throughout the conflict. The disintegration of conventional ideas about society left the post-war generation feeling deeply empty-headed and without any benchmarks to cling to. The members of the Lost Generation became skeptical about the presence of God and blamed God for allowing the brutality of the war to happen as the central characters are making fun regarding religion as it happened in *A Farewell to Arms*. The majority of the characters engaged in various sexual activities that were against widely held religious beliefs. Characters that represent the state of humanity both during and after the conflict are shaped psychologically, sensually, and sexually by the war. Same-gender attraction, androgyny, and heterosexuality brought on by conflict are all present in *A Farewell to Arms*.^{xviii} The superficial relationship between Jake and Cohn in *The Sun Also Rises* serves as a metaphor for the protagonists' lost confidence in friendship; as a result, they are alone in a throng and jump around in relationships; they also lost faith in God and in the enduring bonds that bind people together. People turned to worthless occupations like gambling, bull fighting, sex, racing, heavy drinking, and other forms of escape from the harsh realities of war because of this lack of trust.^{xix} Also here, the promise of the warring myth utterly failed.

WAR TRAUMA

Hemingway's anti-war legacy exposes the void left by warring myths. By doing this, he exposed the trauma of war, which permeates all of his writings. The novel *The Sun Also Rises* addresses the crucial topic of trauma and how individuals deal with it throughout their lives. Jake Barnes, the main character, is experiencing psychological damage from the war, which has left him restless, sleepless, aimless, and disillusioned with the world. It holds true for every character in the book.^{xx} For instance, when Cohn expresses his desire to travel to South America, Jake responds, "Listen, Robert, going to another country doesn't make any difference. I have tried all that. You can't get away from yourself by moving from one place to another. There is nothing to that." Jake is dealing with severe trauma from World War I, which includes wounds and recurring nightmares from the front lines. Because the battle

robbed him of his masculinity and rendered him powerless, he is perpetually disappointed and depressed, and this condition causes him to suffer for the rest of his life. Bret had been in a lot of relationships and was having trouble finding purpose in her life.^{xxi}The war has also traumatized her. The relationship with Jake is also distressing for her because they are unable to fulfill their wishes. Despite not participating in the War, Robert Cohn has suffered from emotional abuse, alienation, and separation.^{xxii} The traumatic stories of violent combat experiences cannot be always fully registered by the soldiers, for example, the protagonist of *A Farewell to Arms* is unable to retain the memory of shell shock entirely. The soldiers want to forget their dreadful past as the trauma lies not in the event itself, but in its immediate and belated reappearance of stressful memories and nightmares.^{xxiii}

LEGACY OF MALE INSECURITY

In World War One, 9.7 million soldiers died and some million got injured. And side by side among 10 million of civilians, some were certainly male. So, the male suffered most in that war. Actually, this war forced a profound reexamination of the definition of masculinity. The terrible trench fighting that typified the war held little relevance for the prewar ideal of the fearless, stoic soldier. Resilience was largely dependent on chance rather than boldness. Thus, the realities of battle undercut traditional ideas about what it meant to be a man. Jake is an example of these societal shifts. Due to injuries during the war, he lost his manhood and became impotent. He always feels awkward in mixing with others though he remains busy in many things. Jake cannot actually enjoy to the fullest due to this sense that he is impotent. On the contrary, Hemingway develops Brett as a boy with “her hairs brushed back like boys” and as a woman with curves like “hull of a racing yacht”.^{xxiv}She thereby epitomizes traits associated with men, whereas Bill, Mike, and Jake are, in differing degrees, unsure of their manhood.^{xxv}

INERTIA AND IDENTITY CRISIS

Like the classic war epic, Hemingway did not present his characters as heroic. His novels are not the birth place of legends. Rather, his characters are the members of Lost Generation who have been corrupted and shattered both physically and mentally by the fake European standard. For this, the members of this expatriate generation spend their time in having sex, gossiping, consuming, wandering from one place to another aimlessly and hanging around cafes. Accordingly, they do not have any control over their actions which is a clear manifestation of the inertia of the Lost Generation. The ‘Lost Generation’ suffered from identity confusion; for example, Lady Brett Ashley is a clear alteration of the role of a traditional femininity and Jake Barnes does not symbolize dominant masculine character rather an introvert, confused, tortured and feminine. Thus, the Lost Generation was suffering from inertia and identity crisis.^{xxvi} In *A Farewell to Arms*, initially all the characters do not have important job to do. They were all involved in trivial matters. Henry, the central character, was nonchalant. Even he was not serious in making love with Cathrine. He, the alter ego of Hemingway himself, was restless when he was on the other shore of Atlantic, did not have interest in war, though he was a volunteer to join the so-called place of bravery. He was suffering from inertia and identity crisis. Hemingway’s central characters are not superheroes like Achilles or Hectors but impotent Jake and nonchalant Henry. And this is how Hemingway deviated and with Jake and Henry produced the futility of war and thus anti-war legacy is created where the warring myth has nothing to do.

CONCLUSION

Ernest Hemingway has been aptly called the twentieth century's one of the most influential writers. He became well-known and left a lasting anti-war legacy with the publishing of *The*

Sun Also Rises and *A Farewell to Arms*. His notoriety grew until his suicide in 1961 and beyond. Hemingway presented brutality, atrocity, nothingness of war. As a war veteran, he projected his ideas which was very close to the experience of the common people who survived the war. As a result, it created anti-war discourse. The sufferings of Henry, Catherine, Jake, Bret, Chon, Mike, Romero are the sufferings of the war survivors. The trauma, the sense of alienation, the insecurity of the characters are all close to the war survivors. Yes, it cannot replicate the experience of those who lived through the war-torn years of the first half of the 20th century, but it offers the truth about those wars as near as we can come by it. Most of the writers who wrote about war followed Hemingway either in theme or in style. The legacy of Hemingway is continued.

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