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EXPLORING NATURALISM IN HEMINGWAY'S 'A FAREWELL TO ARMS'

Ebrahim Barzegar

MA, University of Guilan

(IRAN)

Ebrahimbarzegarny@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The present research traces the Naturalistic elements in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. Hemingway's novel was subjected to various analysis; however, it seems that, due to its rich content, one can examine it through naturalistic lens as well. Hemingway's characters are known for preserving "grace under the pressure" and encountering unhappy ending, like his own lifestyle and death. These points seem to have loose affinity with naturalistic trend and features. Thus, this study attempts to detect and present the naturalistic elements of *A Farewell to Arms* namely natural conflicts, determinism, symbolism in order to show that the protagonists' perspective, Frederick and Catherine, within the novel and along with that the author's attitude in the World War I are pessimistic, deterministic in a large term, naturalistic as a result of the widespread destructive power and influence of war.

Keywords: Ernst Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, Naturalism, Symbolism, Determinism

1. INTRODUCTION

Naturalism is a nineteenth century literary movement which started in France in works of Emile Zola, and then followed by British writers such as Thomas Hardy and George and later appeared in American literature in works of its prominent adherents such as Stephen Crane, Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser. American Naturalist writers explore the cosmic factors that shape the depth of the soul and thought of their characters' life. What they depict was the harsh reality of life during the American industrial changes of late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The First World War with its disastrous effect provides rich grounds for the writers to see human's life once again entrapped in nature, environment and catastrophe. Ernest Hemingway as of the important figure of "lost generation" group created a tragic romantic war novel, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), in which carries the elements of naturalistic movement. This study tries to explore some important elements of this movement in the selected novel.

2. NATURE AND HUMAN CONFLICTS

A Farewell to Arms is considered as one of the best novels of the twentieth century in the world which attracted a lot of readers and critics all around the world to read and examine it from various perspectives namely Naturalism; a literary movement stresses on the heredity and environment of the period. In this section, first the features of naturalism will be explored and then it deals with the deterministic vista of the Hemingway. Last but not least, it tries to detect and present the symbolism in the selected novel.

Setting plays a crucial role in novels, particularly naturalistic ones. Hemingway's setting in *A Farewell to Arms* testifies to the opposition to the romantic period and total changes of its natural discipline. In the first page of the novel, Hemingway describes the setting as,

Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the troops marching along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the soldiers marching and afterward the road bare and white except for the leaves. (P.1)

The repletion of the word "dust" in these lines verifies the fact that the serene and delightful nature has obliterated and instead filth and bareness has taken its place. The natural setting, for Hemingway, provides a great opportunity to externalize his characters' unpleasant depressed feeling during the war. Unlike the romantic novelists

who depict the natural setting beautiful and inspiring, Hemingway gives a gloomy dark description to it. Take the following paragraph as an example.

The forest of oak trees on the mountain beyond the town was gone. The forest had been green in the summer when we had come into the town but now there were the stumps and the broken trunks and the ground torn up, and one day at the end of the fall when I was out where the oak forest had been I saw a cloud coming over the mountain. It came very fast and the sun went a dull yellow and then everything was gray. (p.8)

Nature has lost its beauty utterly and what remains is the “broken trunks” and torn-up ground. Since there is no forest and trees, the novel is filled with dark and depressing color such as gray and black. The dark images are present everywhere. “Gray motor trucks, gray leather shoes, gray beard and moustache, black smoke, gray lake, gray uniform and gray face, to name but a few. Throughout the novel, the dark color is contrasted with the white color such as white villas, white uniforms and white sky. Hemingway has a reason for doing such a striking contrast. By providing the dissimilarities between these two colors in nature and appearance, he intends to put Frederick against Catherine. Whereas Frederick is described in a gray color and mood, Catherine is portrayed in white and bright color. The relationship between Frederick and Catherine points to the pessimistic tone of war and the promising future of hope in Hemingway’s world. The hope in the end turns out to be illusionary and what is everlasting is war.

Naturalistic writers like to highlight the external forces of nature in their texts. The first and foremost example of these forces is war. The setting of the war functions as a real laboratory into which Hemingway places his young Frederick to be scrutinized similar to Henry Fleming in Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). Hemingway offers skillful descriptions of the brutal conflicts between man and war and its consequences. Frederick’s life is presented as a series of struggle against the war. He is a simple ambulance driver situated in an unfamiliar environment which constantly endangers his life. He finds the war terrible and destructive. The retreat of Italian’s army in chapter twenty-seven is one of the best illustrations of disillusionment of Frederick in war,

The retreat was orderly, wet and sullen. In the night, going slowly along the crowded roads we passed troops marching under the rain, guns, horses pulling wagons, mules, motor trucks, all moving away from the front... That night we helped empty the field hospitals that had been set up in the least ruined villages of the plateau, taking the wounded down to Plava on the river-bed: and the next day hauled all day in the rain to evacuate the hospitals and clearing station at Plava... The rain had stopped and the town was nearly empty. As we came up the street they were loading the girls from the soldiers' whorehouse into a truck. There were seven girls... Two of them were crying. (p.207)

The ruined houses, the fatigued horses which pull the wagons, empty hospital and street and the desperate crying girls, all suggest the wretched and pathetic situation caused by war which Frederick thinks “it has nothing to do with me” (p.43). Yet, he feels entrapped by him. War is indifferent to its participants. It does not matter who you are, whether a combat soldier or ambulance driver or a girl, it manifests its power and ruthlessness to the extreme.

Ellen Andrews Knodt thinks that “the shooting of the sergeant is a pivotal point the novel” (Bloom, 2010, p.102). As far as naturalism is concerned, it is of importance in the novel because it shows the effect of war on Frederick. On the retreat way, the car stuck in the mud. Frederick ordered to sergeants to go out and cut a brush so as to find a way out of it. But the two believed that there was no use and they should stop it and then started to run. Hemingway beautifully and shockingly describes the scene as following,

The one sergeant turned. "We have to go on. In a little while you will be cut off. You can't order us. You're not our officer." I order you to cut brush," I said. They turned and started down the road.

"Halt," I said. They kept on down the muddy road, the hedge on either side. "I order you to halt," I called. They went a little faster. I opened up my holster, took the pistol, aimed at the one who had talked the most, and fired. I missed and they both started to run. I shot three times and dropped one. (p.224)

The shocking killing of the sergeant because of not following the order shows the influence of the war on the Frederick. His identity is shaped by the impact of the harsh war. In a sense, he is the product of the war; therefore, naturalistically speaking such a brutal action is not rare of him. Frederick conducts unintelligently in this action and commits an egregious error which is unforgivable. He could have thought wisely and acted sensibly in the situation, yet suddenly he yielded to his natural impulse, anger for instance, and did it. If it weren’t for the environmental situation, he would not have done it. In this scene it seems Hemingway wants to declare that the normal and simple

man like Frederick who has never killed a man in his entire life is subject to committing sin, homicide, only because of his environmental impact. The external pressures releases the "brute" within him

After being attested for the crime of treachery, Frederick was lucky to get chance to dive into the river and escape. River for him is another element of nature that he called for challenge. The river is described as

You do not know how long you are in a river when the current. You do not know how long you are in a river when the current moves swiftly. It seems a long time and it may be very short. The water was cold and in flood and many things passed that had been floated off the banks when the river rose. (p.251)

Challenging with nature is a never ending task for Frederick. He should spare no effort in order to survive. The twisting and curvy path of the river illustrates the hard choice of Frederick. Nonetheless, he did it. Besides natural conflicts, man to man conflicts are also significant in the novel. The first one is between Catherine and Fredrick. The first meeting was dramatic as Henry tried to kiss Catherine but welcomed with a slap on the face "I leaned forward in the dark to kiss her and there was a sharp stinging flash. She had slapped my face hard. Her hand had hit my nose and eyes, and tears came in my eyes from the reflex" (p.30). Furthermore, in a dialogue exchanged between them Fredrick's encounters with his challenge, Catherine's ruinous status, are revealed to the reader. Here is the dialogue as she said "Yes. I want to ruin you." And he replied back "Good," I said, "that's what I want too" (p. 331). The game-like dialogue, in fact, becomes true. By her death, she ruins him psychologically for good, despite the fact that he declaration that that is what he desired. Concerning this point, Mark P. Ott writes, "Nature, not free will, according to naturalist critics, controls the destiny of this couple" (qtd. in Bloom, 2010, p. 43).

In another part of the novel, the lovers confessed that they are fighting for their lives. They feel alienated and isolated in the brutal world that they are living in, and therefore, they should pick up the shield for protection against both environment and people. Catherine Barkley tells Frederic, "there's only us two and in the world there's all the rest of them" and Frederic, as narrator, relates: "we were alone together, alone against the others" (p.273). What he means by "the others" could be taken as people who know them, friends for examples. The "other" indirectly suggested in a revealing sentence of Catherine while she is with Frederick in an expensive hotel,

*"What's the matter, darling?
I never felt like a whore before," she said. I went over to the window and pulled the curtain aside and looked out. I had not thought it would be like this.
You're not a whore.
I know it, darling. But it isn't nice to feel like one." Her voice was dry and flat." (p.170)*

• The established convention dictates that in order to have a sexual relationship, they should be married with each other. And those who do not follow the convention, easily labeled as a "whore". Since they are not officially married yet, Catherine feels that she is one of them. Her personal relationship with Frederick caused a crucial conflict between her and the society they are living in. The passage connotes a strong sense of pessimism which stresses premonition and inescapability of failure or unjustified suffering.

Frederick's alcoholism produces another conflict between him and the nurse. Contracted with jaundice, Fredrick spent his time in bed to rest. While he was forbidden to drink because of his condition, he embarked to do so in ample. From his previous conversation with Catherine, it is revealed that alcoholism was the cause of her father's gout. Here Hemingway clearly depicts that his disease, Jaundice is the result of the alcoholism. In essence, his malady is determined by the heredity which is an important factor in naturalism. Nonetheless, he went on alcohol spree. Miss Van Campen, the head nurse of the Milan Hospital, raged by alcohol consumption of Frederick and criticized him severely.

*"And I was pitying you having jaundice. Pity is something that is wasted on you."
Thank you.
I suppose you can't be blamed for not wanting to go back to the front. But I should think you would try something more intelligent than producing jaundice with alcoholism.
With what?
With alcoholism. You heard me say it." I did not say anything. "Unless you find something else I'm afraid you will have to go back to the front when you are through with your jaundice. I don't believe self-inflicted jaundice entitles you to a convalescent leave. (p. 160)*

The conflict caused by Fredrick's excessive drinking of whisky, brandy, vermouth and cognac. Miss Van Campen believes that he did it on purpose so as to be exempt from going to the front line again. His betrayal seems extremely unfair and cruel for his fellow men and a woman with huge responsibilities who must labor under harsh conditions.

3. DETERMINISM

One of the essential characteristic of naturalism is the concept to determinism. Naturalists were heavily influenced by the work of the French philosopher Hippolyte Adolphe Taine (1828-1893) and the biologist scientist Charles Darwin (1809-1882). The former proposes that we are the product of our environment and the surrounding has a profound influence on people's lives. And the latter sees animal as the human's forefather, particularly apes. These two figures reject the divinity of human beings and degrade him to his basic instincts and desires. Determinist propellers believe that human's free will and his/her chance to choose is nothing but an illusion and it is nature and fate that decide your life. According to the adherents of this philosophy, man's actions are not formulated by his free will; they are out of his control. Since he is part of this world and nature, what he intends to do is forced upon him by nature. In a sense, he plays a part in the machinery of the universe which his free will is almost close to zero.

Deterministic attitude toward life is considered as one of prevalent factor in American naturalistic literature. These writers portray the life of their protagonists in such a way that they are swaying like a puppet in hands of fate, yet they are not aware of this fact. As far as Krause is concerned,

the characteristic mood of deterministic naturalism is mixed and paradoxical. Its key paradox centers on the brute refusal of the human to be sucked down into the vortex of natural law. It is because of their cheerless prospects that we are cheered by the moral drive of the individual characters who suffer much, but . . . still manage to hold themselves intact as human beings despite the animal ruthlessness of others and the natural and social causalities that confine them.(1964, p. 9)

In naturalistic world's view, human being is manipulated by two important and powerful forces: genetic and environmental forces. The death of the Catherine at the end of the novel could be taken as good example of determinism in the novel. In the beginning of Frederick and Catherine relationship, she remarks "I'm afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it" (p.140). Although, he did not pay attention at that moment, he realized it finally when his find his lover dead in his hand while it was raining outside. Or another time Catherine said that "I suppose all sorts of dreadful things will happen to us" (p. 128). In chapter twenty six, Frederick also states that he believes "in sleep" (p.198). These lines are not only pessimistic in tone but also deterministic in essence because the dreadful thing happened to them, she sleeps forever and dies and the joy and happiness for Frederick was just like a dream. Their attempts to build a family is destroyed by war. In this regard, Richard Fantina claims that "*In A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic and Catherine plan to start a family but this attempt proves dramatically abortive with the stillbirth of the child and the death of the mother. Hemingway appears distinctly uncomfortable in the family setting" (2005, p.25). It could be presented that her death is confirmation of the deterministic perspective of Hemingway. The war is alive and kicking; however, men are losing their lives. The war is more powerful than human being. Her inevitable death in the arms of Frederick is the acknowledgement of the weakness of human being against the nature. Despite her efforts and pleas not to die, her lover is of no help. She literally is in fate' hands and her attempts are meaningless and ineffective. To borrows Bloom's words, Frederic Henry is not "a hero, but a man caught up in events in love and war that he did not control" (2010, p.103). while after sever hardships and bouts of struggle, life finally seems to smile at the Frederick, another devastating tragedy strikes and he who is already rendered miserable, is thrown into a yet more unpleasant world. Hemingway simply let him live and suffer in living death. Virtually the entire Hemingway oeuvre is filled with violence and a malevolent vision of the world. A disturbing aspect of this preoccupation reveals itself in not only the act of violence but also with the results of such acts, that is, dead bodies. Much of Hemingway's writing, from the very earliest to the latest, dwells on observations of death.

4. SYMBOLISM

Originated in a late nineteenth-century in France, Symbolism first appeared in painting of Gustave Monreau (1826-1898), Gustav Klimt (1862-1918) and Odilon Redon (1840-1916). However, like other movement soon finds its way into literature. The French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) heralds the beginning of use of symbols in France by publication of he collected poetry called *The Flower of Evil* in 1857. He utilized symbols in his poetry to convey a sense of decadence and eroticism. Some other notable symbolists of France are Jean Nicolas Arthur

Rimbaud (1854-1891), Stephane Mallarme (1842-1898) and Paul Verlaine (1844-1896). These poets believe that the best way to represent truth is through use of symbol. They try to create images in way that could produce and convey meaning indirectly to the readers.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the writers once more attracted to the use of symbol in their writings. M. H. Abrams believes that "Many of the major writers of the period exploit symbols which are in part drawn from religious and esoteric traditions and in part invented. Some of the works of the age are symbolist in their settings, their agents, and their actions, as well as in the objects they refer to" (2005, p.323). Symbol is one of the frequent elements of naturalistic writing. Conveying a wealth of meaning in a brief words or terse images is the objective of these writers. Naturalists made use of symbols in their works. Frank Norris uses mousetrap, floating boat and particularly Golden tooth to symbolize ambitious toward wealth. The Rocking chair in *Sister Carrie* is emblem of the seclusion of her from the world. The mountain in Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of the Courage* epitomizes the ill-omened and ever-present power of nature. Ernest Hemingway also employs symbols to express indirectly what he intended to say.

One of the recurrent symbols in the novel is Catherine's hair. Hemingway from time to time draws readers' attention to this symbol so as to represent the female eroticism and refuge. In the first meeting of Frederick and Catherine in the garden, when his friend Rinaldi and Helen stepped away to give them some space, the first thing that fascinates Frederick was Catherine's hair,

*"You have beautiful hair," I said.
"Do you like it?"
"Very Much"
"I am going to cut it all off when he died"
"No". (1975, p. 19)*

These lines show that Frederick finds beauty and sexuality in her hair and when she said that she is intended to cut it off, he quickly responds with a strong single word "no". Catherine reinforced the symbolic role of her hair in the conversation as she said

I wanted to do something for him. You see I didn't care about the other thing and he could have has it all. He could have had anything he wanted if I would have known. I would have married him or anything. I know all about it now. But then he wanted to go to war and I didn't know". (ibid.)

Her inattention to other thing but "hair" that his deceased fiancé could have had it but preferred not to indirectly but clearly refers to the sexual symbolism of the hair. In another instance, when Frederick is in bed, the narrative focuses on its brightness and twist "She had wonderfully beautiful hair and I would lie sometimes and watch for twisting it up in the light that came in the open door and it shone even in the night as water shines sometimes just before it is really daylight"(p.89-90). The soft hair is not only a plaything for Frederick as these lines suggest "Would you like to pin down my hair? Would you like to play" (p.92), but also arises his sexual feeling as the following acknowledge this statement, "The woman was waving her hair. I sat in the little booth and watched. It was exciting to watch and Catherine smiled and talked to me and my voice was a little thick from being excited" (p.225).

Besides presenting hair as sexual beauty, Hemingway makes use of it as a refuge or isolation from the bitter and ugly reality of the outside world for his insecure protagonist. Frederick's description of Catherine's hair vividly suggests that he is seeking a shelter so as momentarily forget what is going on outside,

I loved to take her hair down and she sat on the bed and kept very still, except suddenly she would dip down to kiss me while I was doing it, and I would take out the pins and lay them on the sheet and it would be loose and I would watch her while she kept very still and then take out the last two pins and it would all come down and she would drop her head and we would both be inside of it, and it was the feeling of inside a tent or behind a falls. (p.89)

Having put himself under her hair, he found solace in the shining delicate cascade within the brutal world of war. Another symbol used by Hemingway in the novel is "rain. During the entire novel, the rain comes, stops and then begins and most often when it restarts a sense of threatening cloud appears immediately. The appearance of rain sometimes causes disease. Take the following sentence as an example. "At the start of the winter came the

permanent rain and with the rain came the cholera" (p.8). Or in another case it brings with itself bombs "The wind rose in the night and at three o'clock in the morning with the rain coming in sheets there was a bombardment" (p.204). The important issue here is that whatever rain causes or brings finally it signifies death.

In chapter nineteen, in a conversation between Frederick and Catherine, she said that she is afraid of the rain and asks question whether Frederick will love her or not,

"It's raining hard."
 "And you'll always love me, won't you?"
 "Yes."
 "And the rain won't make any difference?"
 "No." (p.100)

Feeling sleepy and ready to go to bed, Frederick asks "why you are afraid of it?" and replies, "All right. I'm afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it...and sometimes I see you dead in it" (p.140). From her perspective, the rain brings dissolution of her happy life and symbolizes death. Surprisingly, her visionary words come to realization at the end of the novel. When Catherine was dying of hemorrhage in the hospital, it was raining outside and after her death her lover "left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain" (p.256). As discussed, rain is symbol of death which is aligned with the reading of Louis L. Martz as he took it as "the inevitable trope for pity", and Malcolm Cowley' argument 'as a conscious symbol for disaster" (Bloom, 2010, p.12-13).

Like the rain, the river also has symbolic meaning but with religious implication. Accused of committing treachery, Frederick found an opportunity and escaped from the Italian's hands and dived into the river. Regarding the symbolic image of the river, Sam Bluefarb argues that it has should be concerned as a ritualistic act. The river literally baptizes Henry who after coming on shore takes off his stars and changes from military to civilian man. (1972, p.71). In this case, his swimming in the river cleans him off his military contamination and makes him ready to go to see Catherine as a family man seeking settlement and love. Beauty, rain and river as natural elements are presented in the novel to depict that the more characters try to escape from their misfortune, the deeper they sink into it, as if some unknown, vicious force were toying with them (Abrams, 2007, p.144).

5. CONCLUSION

As the title of this study shows, this paper is dedicated to the analysis of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* from Naturalistic perspective. It is suggested that Hemingway used some elements such as genetic, environmental, natural conflicts in his novels. The environmental forces such as war had a huge impact on Frederick to the point that he becomes a part of it and commits murder. Moreover, the novel shows deterministic attitude toward life of its characters. And finally, in the light of symbolism, Hemingway used Catherine's hair as erotic desire for Frederick, rain as the emblem of death and river as cleansing ritual. In fact, it is revealed that the characters despite their full efforts are just a plaything in the hands of fate and they are doomed to failure and disaster.

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