
Use of love and intoxication to escape in *A Farewell to Arms*

In Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, love and intoxication are closely tied to the even grander theme of escape. Although escape is a greater driving force, it exists in its connection to these other themes. This complex relationship is found not only in Hemingway's use of action and language, but also in the minds and philosophies of most of the major characters. Escape seems a natural preoccupation in a state of war. Hemingway makes it the founding principle in such a situation, and focuses on what is escaped to rather than the skeleton of a war being fought in the meantime. Time and time again, love and intoxication appear in this capacity.

Hemingway creates a strong foundation for this relationship in the action of the novel. By presenting characters in the face of a universally threatening situation, there is an understandably survivalist tone in the attitude of his characters towards the war. Escape as a driving theme is a product of this subtle tone. The war is avoided in conversation, in thought, and eventually in participation when Henry and Catherine desert their roles in its development. Both of these characters have also left their homelands behind, and Henry especially has several scenes of physical escape in the story. It is particularly significant that he loses his leave in Milan, because he is actually accused of consciously using alcoholism to escape the front. (144) But beneath the larger, more obvious events of escape in the novel, love and intoxication become the everyday vessels of avoidance. It is crucial that both exist simultaneously for Henry to survive this war.

Intoxication and love bear similar characteristics in the novel. Henry's thought that "the thing to do was to be calm and not get shot or captured," (212) is representative of the motivation behind all the hedonism and escapism of these characters. They are patiently escaping the war every day in subtle ways. These methods of avoidance involve concentrating on units of the erotic. Hemingway weaves these sensuous moments together in what Professor Fisher calls a "narrative of omission." This style itself is symbolic of escape. The author's distinctly modernist goal of representing full moments of experience leads him to center a reader's attention away from the war. The story is told in a series of erotic moments, all avoiding the horrifying reality of war that should be more central. These moments are especially subtle when they are made "calm" in the forms of love and intoxication.

The idea that these are calm sensations is unique to Hemingway, and unique to the context of the novel. In the opening pages, Henry is already "[sitting] with a friend and two glasses," (6) an arrangement he is found in too often to be called simple social ritual. Rinaldi later classifies this

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systemic numbing with alcohol as "self-destruction day by day." (172) It is extremely important to note that the intoxication of this novel includes the consumption of food. Hemingway's descriptions of eating are strangely sensual, almost drunk in their labored hedonism. He relates the scene of a group of men eating pasta with no forks: I lowered it into the mouth, sucked and snapped in the ends, and chewed, then took a bite of cheese, chewed, and then a drink of the wine...They were all eating, holding their chins over the basin, tipping their heads back, sucking in the ends...Something landed outside that shook the earth. (54)

In this case, the men experience a specific erotic sensation with war actually raging in the background. A less obvious juxtaposition of this nature can be found in an interaction between Henry and Rinaldi. Having just been reunited, the two men relate on a level personal enough to be called erotic, with the pet names "baby," and even Rinaldi's demand of "kiss me once and tell me you're not serious." The eroticism runs parallel to the consumption of alcohol, justified by Rinaldi with "this war is terrible...Come on. We'll both get drunk and be cheerful...then we'll feel fine." (168) The sensuality of this exchange is even embodied by alcohol, as the clinking of cognac glasses provides a substitute for sexual consummation. This is a successful escape, as these two men are coping by both loving each other and becoming intoxicated.

Through his feelings for Catherine, Henry comes to understand the importance and difficulty of truly escaping pain. With the necessity for avoidance an accepted state, the lovers are always escaping to each other and escaping together. This activity drives their relationship, from beginning to end. The reader is introduced to Miss Barkley when Henry first hears of her, from Rinaldi. She is immediately, though subtly associated with escape in the language of this moment. When Rinaldi ends his speculation that "Every week some one gets wounded by rock fragments....Next week the war starts again," with "Do you think I would do right to marry Miss Barkley after the war of course?," Catherine is established as a way out of the horror and atrocity. When Henry visits her alone for the first time, he has to be reminded by the head nurse that "there's a war on, you know," only to "[say] I knew." (23) This too establishes the nature of their relationship very early in the novel, for both Henry and the reader. In this first meeting, he even responds to Catherine's hope that "we do get along," with "yes,...And we have gotten away from the war." (26) This is in the beginning stages of their love affair, when their interaction still falls in the category of intoxication. Henry does not yet realize that this is not enough.

What is at first an indulgent escape from reality develops into a more serious love as the war gets closer and closer to the characters. Initially, Henry incorrectly diagnoses his relationship with Catherine as simply "better than going every evening to the house for officers where the girls climbed all over you...."(30) At this point, he has not realized the capacity of love in running from the larger dilemma at hand. He has yet to understand the powerful role Catherine already plays in his experience at war. It is only when she is not there one night to provide this

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necessary escape that he understands he "had treated seeing Catherine very lightly."(40) He now sees that his "nights when the room whirled...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 unreal in the dark and so exciting that you must resume again unknowing and not caring into the night, sure that this was all and all and all and not caring,"(13) were inadequate. Simple intoxication is not enough when there is not also love. Henry survives the war by understanding the necessity for something worthy of escaping to, and being lucky enough to find this in Catherine.

Escape not only drives the love affair, but also describes its nature. When they are reunited in the American hospital in Milan, Catherine sneaks into Henry's room every night. This act in itself is a small escape. In the details of their interaction, such minor examples of fleeing are frequent. Right away, Henry is asking "isn't there anywhere we can go?," (30) and complaining "I wish there was someplace we could go." (31) Catherine says "I wish we could go for a walk," (102) to get out of the hospital room in Milan. Even in an instance when they escape the monotony of hospital life with a day at the races, they need to get away from their group of friends for a moment. (132) Somehow, their strange relationship grows constantly by new escapes. When announcing her pregnancy, Catherine asks "you don't feel trapped?," to hear "Maybe a little. But not by you." (139) It is precisely this ability of Catherine's to avoid trapping Henry that makes her the perfect escape, and even secures his love.

It is fitting that the central force behind this entire narrative is the desire for freedom, even for a touch of chaos. Hemingway strives to write a war novel that escapes the horrors of war. He succeeds in doing so by establishing two interactive and necessary factors in Henry's experience of war. There is the absolute necessity for numbing, for any narcotic, that drives the rampant alcoholism. On a deeper level it sets a standard for the strange, almost drunk moments of dialogue between Catherine and Henry. The ending of the novel is itself a final escape. Henry had run to Catherine and found an equal balance of love and intoxication to carry him through the war, and even through escaping the war. But he never displays love for or interest in the child he has created. Catherine too seems to view her pregnancy as a disgusting and annoying state. Thus, the tragic ending provides a final flight from reality. There will be no impending responsibility or hardship to demand structure in this relationship. Even the inevitable consequence of nature is avoided. But this time, Henry has only his sorrow to drown in as he grasps freedom.

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