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The Heroic Image in a Modern World: Enlightened Naturalism in Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms"

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THE HEROIC IMAGE IN A MODERN WORLD:
"
ENLIGHTENED NATURALISM IN ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S
A FAREWELL TO ARMS

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Winifred Bailey

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ABSTRACT

In his attempt to "write truly" about man in relationship to his universe, Hemingway found it necessary to reconcile two opposing literary traditions--the heroic and the naturalistic. Identifying closely with his protagonist, Hemingway demanded heroism of his main character even though the heroic tradition called for a universe with some prevailing moral order. The world of his experience showed Hemingway no such order and posed a problem for his work: How could he create a heroic figure against a naturalistic backdrop?

To examine this problem, it is initially necessary to establish a definition of naturalism as a literary tradition with particular beliefs and methods well-described by Emile Zola. The paper then focuses on the extent to which naturalism influences Hemingway's style and image of the hero in A Farewell to Arms.

Close examination of the novel reveals a pattern of escapes and returns which allow protagonist Frederick Henry to survive between the extremes of instinctual and socialized worlds. Refusing to conform totally to either world's code, Henry forms his own set of rules and values and thereby maintains his individual identity. The strength of this individuality sustains him in a world which he perceives to be, at best, indifferent. Despite his realization of the amorality of his universe, Henry lives courageously by his own ethical code.

Dealing with man's relationship to his universe, naturalistic philosophy raises important questions as to the possibility for heroic action in an amoral, indifferent setting. Hemingway's portrayal of the protagonist, Frederick Henry, reconciles elements of naturalism with a modern heroic ethic to bring about the enlightened naturalism discernible in A Farewell to Arms.

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"All of you young people who served in the war. You are a lost generation... exactly as the garage keeper said."¹

With these words, Gertrude Stein glibly dismissed a whole generation, declaring them a sacrifice to the upheaval of world war. In her eyes, these young people were wanderers with notions of home, fixed standards, and sense of direction shattered by events beyond their understanding. Hemingway scoffed at the "dirty, easy labels"² but Ms. Stein's phrase--"une génération perdue"--stuck with him. His irritation and fascination reflect Hemingway's own struggle for a definition of man in relationship to his universe. Although unwilling to write man off as "lost," he arrived at a vision in which man's life is determined by forces beyond his control or comprehension. It is a vision almost painful for one as obsessed with heroism as Hemingway is--for, can heroism exist in a world where virtue, strength, and good acts insure neither survival nor reward? Indeed, man's actions seem to have no relationship to their own outcome. To reconcile his need for a possibility of heroism with his naturalistic vision of the universe. Hemingway had to find a new criterion

for heroism in an indifferent world and transcend the fatalistic naturalism implicit in Stein's dismissal.

Ernest Hemingway discounted the notion that his particular generation could excuse itself as a casualty of the war: "all generations were lost by something and always had been and always would be."³ Though he certainly realized the extent to which he had been cut off from his parents' era of relative peace and prosperity, Hemingway preferred to see his generation's reaction to war as part of a recurring pattern of alienation. To him, the war's violence expanded to symbolize the condition of the universe for man. Hemingway considered it easy and dirty for Stein to label a man "lost": in a world whose perpetual state is war, violence, and corruption, the human creature starts out as lost, no matter what his particular historical or social context. This much was a basic assumption in Hemingway's view of the universe. From this point, it is an easy transition to the heavily naturalistic philosophy which sees man as no more than a manifestation of his social and physical environment. Hemingway manages to transcend this simplified, deterministic viewpoint by emphasizing that a man can attain a degree of heroism through the quality of his response to a brutal environment. Throughout his works, Hemingway strives to find the image which will render

man superior to indifferent forces by giving him not philosophical ideals but a means of survival.

Hemingway's world was largely a tragic one: early in his own life, he came to a deep realization of the omnipresence of senseless violence, cruelty, and death. However, his protagonist can never achieve the proportions of the classical tragic hero because of the limits of Hemingway's view. In the classical sense, the protagonist is a noble man who stands above normal mortals in his magnanimity of thought and action. Despite the grandeur of his character, he possesses flaws which allow ordinary human beings to empathize with him. Whether his end is comic or tragic, he suffers certain reversals in the course of events but manages to regain some measure of his former stature by coming to terms with himself, accepting guilt for his downfall, or justifying his salvation by his heroism. The net result is a reaffirmation of belief in a prevailing universal moral order.

Hemingway's naturalistic view of the universe makes this reaffirmation impossible for his protagonist.. Though Hemingway sees life as a task of preserving oneself through honesty, courage, and skill, his hero is usually "a man things are done to."⁴ There is no prevailing moral order in Hemingway's naturalistic universe. There is no predictable pattern of cause and effect in which a man may expect to act well and be rewarded or act badly and be punished. Essentially, then, Hemingway draws elements

from two seemingly opposite traditions--the old heroic world view and the modern, naturalistic one--to form his own idea of man's relationship to the universe. The older tradition allows him the heroic man of action but presupposes a moral order in which Hemingway cannot believe. The modern view comes closer to his conception of an indifferent, incomprehensible universe but leaves man in a pawnlike position which Hemingway cannot tolerate. Therefore, Hemingway must combine techniques and ideas to accommodate the older world view to a modern conception of the universe and still transcend the puppet characters of earlier naturalists if he is to create a heroic ethic against a naturalistic backdrop. He must ~~disprove~~ Hawthorne's statement; "A hero cannot be a hero unless in an heroic world."⁵

Looking briefly at the naturalistic tradition on which he built, one can see how Hemingway combined scientific description of fact with his own symbolism and understated emotion to create, in Lt. Henry, the protagonist of A Farewell to Arms, a character initiated into an arbitrary world in which he manages to survive. The result is an enlightened naturalism: Hemingway relieved the reader's sense of man as a pawn by converting Henry's fulfillment of animal drives into manifestations of skill and strength which establish the individual identity of the hero in an indifferent world. Through the pattern of escapes and returns which

emerges from Henry's actions, Hemingway manages to create a character who maintains his heroic ethic by balancing two extreme views—one socialized, the other instinctual—which would control and destroy the individual identity in a modern world.

An initial definition of naturalism is basic to the determination of its influence on Hemingway in A Farewell to Arms. Naturalism is an attitude so constant in human experience that it is impossible to trace or define it completely within the limits of this paper. However, the nineteenth century scientists Darwin and Comte served as a link between literature and science when they contributed the notion that man could be understood through physical, psychological, and social facts. Writers saw a possible literary application of the scientific method with its emphasis on objective observation and external reality. Adapting this emphasis to the techniques of their literature, early naturalistic writers, such as Norris, London, and Dreiser, found that certain other scientific ideas and methods also transferred easily. Indeed, naturalistic philosophy developed a world view loosely based on Darwin's theory of evolution with its belief in progress and its implied definition of the world as a place of endless flux. Even man's ideals became a product of historical evolution and a means of survival.⁶ The growth of industrialization and materialism underlined the concentration on externals

which manifested itself in the naturalists' emphasis on visible reality.⁷

As a literary movement, naturalism is difficult to delineate because it experienced such a dynamic process of development. Its adherents formed many groups, published credos, and often moved on to other philosophies, so that naturalism was, in no sense, a single unified movement. However, Emile Zola emerges as a dominant voice in naturalist tradition begun in France.⁸

Building on the realistic tradition of Flaubert, Stendhal, and Balzac, Zola developed a theory of fiction, whose innovations were largely those of method. According to Zola, the artist must aim for absolute objectivity to portray reality in his work. He must have a scientific, almost surgical attitude towards his work and his characters. Intervention of imagination is a romantic presumption which threatens to obscure realism. The correct technique is objective observation and documentation of facts. In Zola's own words:

...it happens that facts classify themselves logically, this one before that.., the story composes itself out of all the collected observations...and the conclusion is nothing more than a natural and inevitable consequence.⁹

This view of the artist as a recorder of fact has a telling effect on the author's portrayal of characters, whose humanity suffers from the novelist's reduction of human passions and thoughts to physical causes. Indeed, as Zola

reports in his preface to Therese Raquin, the characters' humanity and soul are absent: they are "human animals dominated by their nerves and blood, devoid of free will...."¹⁰ According to Zola's professed doctrine, then, there is no possibility for heroism because man has no free will and, therefore, no choice in the way in which he will act. His characters are "bare, live anatomical specimens" drawn from "study of a strange physiological cases" conducted "like a doctor with a purely scholarly interest."¹¹ Zola decreed himself a "scientist of literature!" The author could vary the factors and experiment with his characters according to the techniques of scientific method because human nature was a calculable product of heredity and environment. Like the scientist, the author should be concerned with visible results--
Sac. V fact.--and not intangibles of morality. Zola's application of the scientific method to literary technique remained a distinguishing element of naturalistic literature.¹²

Definitions of early naturalistic theory which developed after Zola vary widely from Block's "any materialistic, secular, or scientific attitude towards human experience"¹³ to Huret's "a particular way of thinking, of seeing, of reflecting, of studying, of making experiments, a need to analyze in order to know, rather than a particular style of writing."¹⁴ Certain characteristic elements of the theory stand out. The naturalist seeks to portray human experience honestly through an accurate observation of reality which

verges on scientific documentation. This scientific influence also appears in a deterministic view of events represented in the operation of biological and social forces. The naturalistic novelist's subject matter is often shocking or gruesome, his vocabulary striking and earthy. He uses a great deal of photographic detail to intensify the reader's sense of realism.¹⁵ The naturalistic character, determined by elements of nature acting on him from outside or from within, seems to have no "self" because the deterministic simplification of character robs man of free will and responsibility for his actions. By thus eliminating the potentiality for heroic action, the naturalistic novelist decreases the interest in character but heightens his representative function so that the data obtained from the experimentation of the novel can be scientifically applied to a greater number of cases.

Given the broad foundation of European naturalism and its own transcendentalist tradition, American naturalism developed relatively free of dominant theory. Nature had always played an influential role in American literature but, in the collapse of the agrarian myth and the onslaught of social and economic problems arising from the industrial boom, its role seemed to be changing around the turn of the century. Under scientific analysis, nature evolved from a symbol of God and man to a controlling force, both alien and terrifying.¹⁶ The naturalist's world is one of substantial

things. It is inhabited by characters who are made up
of what they do and what happens to them.¹⁷

To the naturalist, human behavior is a function of its social environment; the individual is the live register of its qualities; he exists in it as animals exist in nature.¹⁸

Whether or not one agrees with Mr. Rahv's restrictive definition, the statement presents an extreme view of naturalism which helps place Ernest Hemingway's world view in a perspective. The extremely naturalistic world, defined by Mr. Rahv, is closed and limited, lacking room for anything which is not a product of its particular social context. The pure naturalist amasses specific detail to reduce his character to a type--a figure born with certain tendencies which mark him for a particular use by arbitrary forces. In fact, the individual is portrayed as subordinate to a background environment which is more powerful and therefore becomes more of a central focus than its inhabitant.¹⁹ This extreme naturalism is rare and difficult to sustain artistically but, nevertheless, presents a useful contrast to Hemingway's enlightened naturalism in A Farewell to Arms.

Naturalism exerts a two-fold influence in Hemingway's novel: it is clearly discernible in his style and in his vision of an indifferent universe. Like Zola and the earlier proponents of a scientific method for literature, Hemingway places great emphasis on technique in an attempt

to replace grandiose words and sentiments with a more objective truth. Just as his protagonists value skill in whatever job they undertake, so Hemingway strives for a stylistic clarity to convey a reality reduced to sensory experience. With detachment, irony, and understatement, Hemingway weeds out the extraneous matter until he arrives at just the exact, bare words which catch the few tangible details that the disillusioned may trust.

This attention to tangible detail and clear, objective language gives the book an almost journalistic realism. Hemingway's stylistic goals are suggested by an early statement in which Henry describes his own fixation on details during "nights when the room whirled and you needed to look at the wall to make it stop."²⁰ Like earlier naturalists, Hemingway and Henry both feel a need to focus on some indisputably authentic detail to achieve direct sensory knowledge with which to combat the flux of the world around them. When the incomprehensibility of the outside world threatens sanity, Hemingway, the artist, and Henry, the man, resort to painstaking detail and concrete experience to salvage a sense of life and humanity.

Nowhere is this technique more effective than in the opening chapter. Lt. Henry is telling his story in retrospect. From the confusion of all that has happened to him through love, war, and loss, he must sort out and convey the truth of his experience. Rejecting the sentimental and grandiose, he

relies on specific natural details to touch off a series of important associations which will allow the reader to discern, objectively, the reality of Henry's experience. Rather than describe his subjective emotion, Hemingway selects autumnal images to suggest the inexorability of seasonal change which, in the natural cycle of birth and death, early robs Henry of his lover like the "leaves that fell early that year(p.3)." A sense of doom, failure, and impotence derives from the avoidance of action verbs which further detaches Henry from the setting. Love, death, and war are the facts of A Farewell to Arms, introduced through association with natural detail in this first chapter.

When his attention expands from natural detail to a view of the universe, the picture remains largely naturalistic: even in the midst of love, Henry's world is a threatening one, full of senseless, irrelevant disaster. After the ordeal at Caporetto, Henry rejoins Catherine and they are lyrically alone together--but "alone against the others (p.249)". Even the relative security of the arms of a lover cannot protect Henry from intervening thoughts of a hostile outside world:

The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break, it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry (p.249).

Henry's wartime experiences with violence and love are essential to Hemingway's world view. The violence of the war is a metaphor for the indifference and cruelty of the universe which Henry tries to escape in his love for Catherine. In such a God-abandoned, inverted universe, love seems to breed death rather than new life.²¹ For Henry, love is passing, a transient ecstasy which leads to disillusionment and a rage against the natural powers. X
The dual meaning of the title's farewell to arms underlines the knowledge of the initiated Henry--in love and war, the only certainty is death. In love, as in war, he is cruelly limited by an omnipresent "they," robbed even of the illusion that courage or love can save him from the prevailing emptiness of his isolation. 7

Yet, despite the attention to detail and the view of a threatening world, Hemingway's work transcends pure naturalism. Like the naturalist, he uses a scientific method of observation from which he translates factual data into fiction to relate the essence of true experience. But, rather than relegate the protagonist to a pawn-like position, Hemingway's work aims at defining an heroic role so that the man in crisis can come to terms with himself in a world he cannot understand. In this description of Henry's first wound, Hemingway masterfully blends naturalistic detail with the subjectivity of human suffering:

I sat up straight and as I did so something inside my head moved like the weights on a doll's eyes and it hit me inside in back of my eyeballs. My legs felt warm and wet and my shoes were wet and warm inside. I knew that I was hit and leaned over and put my hand on my knee. My knee wasn't there. My hand went in and my knee was down on my shin. I wiped my hand on my shirt and another floating light came very slowly down and I looked at my leg and was very afraid. Oh, God, I said, get me out of here (p.56).

This combination of detached observation in the detailed description of his realization of the wound plus the subjective admission of fear and agony allows the author to be simultaneously inside and outside of the action as it unfolds.²²

Although Hemingway sees the universe naturalistically, he does see man as more than a register of his environment. The environment may be indifferent violence and cruelty but, if man is capable of reacting emotionally as an individual, then there are many possible human actions. Essentially a moralist, Hemingway distinguished between right and wrong responses and the search for a sustainable heroism became a center of his work. In an age of anti-heroes, he was singularly preoccupied with a contemporary figure who behaves heroically after recognizing the moral emptiness of his universe. This figure has little to do with the traditional concept of the heroic man of action in search of glory, fortune or justice. A product of acute natural instinct as well as certain ingrained social ideals, the Hemingway hero

struggles to survive in a world in which he cannot rely on any externally fixed code. Hemingway is concerned with the individual under pressure: the hero is a man alone. Alienated from any community through his detached role as volunteer, Henry must find within himself the capacity to endure. Receiving no support from the cosmos, he attempts to compensate for universal indifference and survive through his own courage and tenacity. In the force of his tragic individualism, Hemingway finds a promise of potential modern heroism.

The Hemingway hero comes to initiation with the realization that he lives in a world in which the controlling forces are, at best, indifferent to him. Heavily naturalistic literature frequently portrays a protagonist crippled by the indifference of his universe and reduced to a mere pawn moved about by random circumstance. This naturalistic protagonist is acted upon more than he acts. Although he maintains a naturalistic view of the world, Hemingway portrays Lt. Henry as an active man who manages to overcome many of the obstacles set up at random by this environment. Significantly, Lt. Henry is ^{one} of the very few first person protagonists in naturalistic literature. Telling his own story, he seems more in command than a Maggie or McTeague whose actions are relayed to the reader by an omniscient observer. This device clearly centers attention on Henry as the focal point though a strongly naturalistic environment looms behind him. He never

succumbs completely to either his natural or his social environment. Instead, he survives by a pattern of escapes which allow him to grow strong and confront the challenge that both natural and social worlds present to his identity as an individual.

Rendered externally tough through suffering, Henry is, nevertheless, sensitive enough to discern at least two means by which to order his existence--one socialized, the other instinctual. He cannot live totally in a socially controlled world with externally imposed rules nor can he exist wholly by instinct. He sees the socially controlled world of army and war on one extreme and the instinctual world of Catherine and love on the other. He cannot preserve his individuality if he lives totally in either. To maintain his image of himself as hero, he attempts to fashion his own third system of morality and behavior by allowing himself escape and return to each world. In crisis, he tends to reduce social forces to a vague "they" who threaten to break, arrest, or destroy him unless he can escape through his own skills as a man. Similarly, his attitude toward natural forces and instincts is as ambivalent as the rain, an inconsistent symbol recurring in scenes of love, death, and contest with natural elements. In the convalescent interludes, away from the crisis of action, he cannot satisfy himself with any conventional rules or formulae that would reduce his world to comprehensible proportions. To remain in

balance, Henry must live in the pattern of escapes and returns which emerges from Farewell. This interplay of indifferent, a moral setting and the protagonist seeking his own means for survival lightens the naturalism inherent in Henry's struggle with forces beyond his understanding. Unlike the purely naturalistic character, he is not entirely acted upon and at the mercy of these hostile or indifferent powers. Sensitive to natural and social forces, he gropes for his own credo-for knowledge gleaned from personal experience with which to live well in a modern world.

The interplay of naturalism and self-determination gives structure to A Farewell to Arms. Hemingway builds up the reader's sense of man in a naturalistic world with a pattern of recurring images of natural and societal pressures within and outside of man. Lt. Henry is the focal point of these images. He is heroic in a modern sense typical of the Hemingway man of action: he has great capacity for strong emotion and responds fully to the experiences that present themselves to him. The most prevalent images represent him as an instinctual man, sensuously aware of his surroundings and his own basic urges. In a more naturalistic novel, this highly instinctual nature might render the protagonist less human. But, because Henry possesses the skills and strengths to pursue and obtain the good things he perceives, he converts the fulfillment

of basic animal drives into manifestations of skill, strength, and esthetic discrimination. A man of few unnecessary words, he frequently waxes nearly poetic in descriptions of food or drink, as in this sensuous detail of a wine bottle:

...it swung in a metal cradle and you pulled the neck of the flask down with the forefinger and the wine, clear red, tannic and lovely, poured out into the glass held by the same hand(p.7).

Sex is another basic urge treated sensitively in description:

...in our room with the long empty hall outside and our shoes outside the door, a thick carpet on the floor of the room, outside the windows the rain falling and in the room light and pleasant and cheerful, then the light out and it exciting with smooth sheets and the bed comfortable, feeling that we had come home, feeling no longer alone, waking in the night to find the other one there, and not gone away; all other things were unreal (p.249).

This attention to detail is both mastery and escape.

Isolating those elements of reality with which he can tangibly deal, Henry is momentarily able to escape an overview which threatens to unbalance him. This brief respite restores him and enables him to survive rather than submit completely. Henry does approach submission to his instinctual awareness of natural urges frequently, as in the womblike, moist half-darkness of the freight train following his escape from Caporetto.²³ "I was not made to think. I was made to eat. My God, yes. Eat and drink and sleep with Catherine(p.233)." This would appear to

be the height of Henry as "natural man" but is, instead, a temporary surrender to his instinctual tendencies. It is an escape from the socialized extreme of the military man to the equally impossible extreme of Catherine's fantasy world built on instinct. An examination of Henry, and of Henry and Catherine together, reveals the complexity of his character as social and instinctual man. Though both strains make up his character, Henry never totally surrenders to an extreme which would render him a purely naturalistic protagonist, easily reduced to stereo-type.

The opening chapter sets a youthful mood of rebellion as well as a sensitivity to natural detail that forecasts the action of the rest of the book. Here, Henry describes the swiftly moving water to recur in the two rivers on which he will later escape. He notes the changing seasons, a natural cycle like that of birth and death which will take Catherine away from him early. Rain creates mud to splash on the king and generals who, in turn, create a façade of command for this chaos of war. And the mud also splashes on the soldiers, "passing on the road, they marched as though they were six months gone with child(p.4)." In reality, they carry guns and destruction, a perversion of natural cycles akin to the many other images of war-waste. Already, "things went very badly" and "permanent rain" brought the cholera. Using every detail in this opening to foreshadow the structure of Farewell, Hemingway

prepares us for the story of a "human heart ravaged by grief, a life made as bare as the trees at the start of winter."²⁴

The initial view of Henry in his society of officers does not suggest any particularly enlightened or profound understanding of his relationship to his environment. Before he falls in love with Catherine, Lt. Henry satisfies his natural urges in ways acceptable to his society of men. He is a boy, seeing most of his life as a game. There is "not the feeling of a storm coming (p.3)," and Henry is removed from love, death, and war by the games provided by his society of men. With his fellow officers, he assumes an almost innocent cynicism: true realization of the war's implications is kept at a distance by the prevailing attitude of "making jokes." The war itself is a game, with no threat of death for him:

...Well, I knew I would not be killed. Not in this war. It did not have anything to do with me. It seemed no more dangerous to me myself than war in the movies(p.37).

Even his instincts are blunted by the attitude of joking and games. Sex is an urge to be satisfied by whores when Henry goes on leave or by his manipulation of a slightly crazy nurse, "certain, seeing it all ahead like moves in a chess game(p.26)." During this time, Henry is uninitiated. He moves within the limits of his particular social situation, "really wanting" to escape

to a clean, natural world like the Abruzzi but not being able to. He feels an affinity with the priest whom his friends mock because "he had always known what I did not know and what, when I learned it, I was always able to forget. But I did not know that then, although I learned it later(p.14)." This vague knowledge is to grow out of Henry's experience. In his relationship with Catherine, Lt. Henry comes to a gradual awareness of the societal and natural forces which threaten to determine his life for him. A comparison of their reactions points up the degree to which social factors influence him while Catherine acts almost totally on instinct. As Catherine and Henry become a unity, the combined pressures of an arbitrary "they" and the "biological trap" gradually grow to proportions which Henry must confront mentally.

Henry is always more aware of social convention than Catherine. In fact, Catherine is a Hemingway fantasy, an extension of Henry's instinctual self. She is too good, too motivated by pure, natural instincts, to survive in a world where there is no real justice or moral order. Initiated through suffering, Catherine is half mad when Henry meets her and is existing with no real will to live. She discounts the social or religious conventions that might solace her. Her suffering has stripped her bare of the desire for the social survival games which she initially plays with Henry. She has faced the emptiness

underlying those surface niceties and depends instead on her sharpened instincts because her first loss came, partially, through naive reliance on myths and rules ingrained by an obsolete social order. Catherine is more than ready to love--it is her only refuge in a world without meaning for her. She knows, before Henry does, that "we're going to have a strange life(p.27)" but she offers herself freely, with no regard for the conventional forms which formerly robbed her life of substance.

A pattern of escapes and returns runs through the course of their affair. Henry gradually discards the social courtship rituals: when Catherine discloses her knowledge that it's "a rotten game we play(p.31)," he begins to puzzle over superficial life with the officers:

I had treated seeing Catherine very lightly,
I had gotten somewhat drunk and had nearly
forgotten to come but when I could not see
her there I was feeling lonely and hollow(p.41).

He comes to Catherine drunk with the wine and camaraderie of the officers' society with which he had earlier tried to camouflage the emptiness of his life. Now, the old game will not work: her absence forces him to confront the loneliness beneath his toughened exterior.

The war intrudes on the progressing affair but widens the crack in Henry's protective toughness and prepares him for a deeper relationship with Catherine. A trench

mortar shell shatters the cinematic quality of the war along with Henry's illusion of himself as isolated and distant from its death and destruction: "I tried to breathe but my breath would not come...I went out swiftly, all of myself, and I knew I was dead...(p.54)." The war is now real and immediate to Henry: he is caught up in the storm and hellish heat conveyed in vivid, nightmarish detail: "then there was a flash, as when a blast furnace door is swung open, and a roar that started white and went red and on and on in a rushing wind(p.54)."

His wound is mental and physical: it renders him inactive, vulnerable at the mercy of doctors--another variety of the ever-intruding "they" who do "things to you so that it was not your body any more(p.231)." Henry is at his most passive point, constantly dependent on others to act upon him. Images of this surrender abound. Placed in the ambulance below a hemorrhaging man, he is unable to escape the relentless blood falling "very slowly, as drops fall from an icicle after the sun has gone(p.61)," until "they" remove the dead man's stretcher. At the field hospital, "when they lifted you up out of bed to carry you into the dressing room, you could look out of the window see the new graves in the garden(p.75)." Arriving in Milan, "they unloaded us in the freight yard(p.81)," like animals from a slaughter house. This first skirmish with his own vulnerability reduces Henry from the joking self-confidence

of the officer's mess to an alarming passivity. Wounded and dependent, he comes to an awareness of himself as a pawn: "I woke sweating and scared and then went back to sleep trying to stay outside of my dream(p.88)."

Catherine's entrance calls him back to action: "When I saw her I was in love with her. Everything turned over inside of me(p.91)." He is back in control in true Hemingway fashion, strong enough for lovemaking despite his convalescent condition: "You're not strong enough," "Yes. I am... The wildness was gone and I felt finer than I had ever felt(p.92)." Without his former distance, Henry is open for Catherine's love and their affair rescues him from the passivity which threatened to destroy his individuality.

The Milan interlude is a period of mental and physical convalescence: Henry gradually escapes the wound-induced indifference and grows strong again in his love for Catherine. However, social and natural forces intrude to underline the impossibility of their idyllic community of two. The episode at the races reflects their inevitable future: "they" pervert natural competition so that Henry and Catherine cannot win. Henry and Catherine initially play the game with the information provided by the racketeers who are, practically speaking, an institution. Winning very little, they decide to forget the crooked tips and play by their own guesses. "I feel so much cleaner(p.131)."

Catherine says--but they lose. Just after this, the "biological trap" springs; Catherine is pregnant, a part and a victim of the natural cycle. The interlude closes unpleasantly with Henry accused of inducing jaundice to remain in the hospital. "They" send him back to the front, in the rain, without complete articulation of his wounded leg.

These preliminary images of losing move toward Henry's great retreat at Caporetto. Waiting in the rain for the painstaking military movement, Henry decides to shortcut his official orders, and takes a farm road which leads him into trouble. His actions reflect a progressive abandonment of his former moral and psychological stance.²⁵ He loses his way: in his puzzled wanderings through a whole countryside in flight, Henry loses his command--the three ambulances and drivers--shoots a man casually, and finally loses his identity in the endless line of the retreating masses. He is gradually alienated from his former affiliations with society. The barn where he hides with Piani recalls childhood days but he severs these ties to family and past:

"The barn was gone now and one year they had cut the hemlock woods and there were only stumps, dried tree-tops, branches and fireweed where the woods had been. You could not go back(p.216)."

Rejoining his own army, he finds that the arbitrary powers who had before tried to reward his valor with medals or words like "sacred," "glorious," now want to destroy him

for equally indefinable reasons.

Once again pushed to confrontation, the instinct to survive governs his reaction--escape. Plunging into the river, he is alone and free. In contest with natural elements of swiftly moving water and rain, his manly skills can save him. Though his valor counted for little with the carabinieri, the long journey back to Catherine reassures him of his physical ability to endure. It is not a complete farewell to social institutions because Henry cannot stop thinking about the war and his former life. Trying to rationalize his desertion, he compares himself to the floorwalker who "would not be expected to return" if "they shot floorwalkers after a fire,..because they spoke with an accent they had always had(p.232)."

Henry cannot totally repudiate society because, like that floorwalker, he must "seek other employment" to go forward. The internal struggle of hunger and desire for Catherine versus the thoughts of his desertion sharpens him for the external endurance test of the journey--to her and away from the war. "I had made a separate peace(p.243)," says Henry, but the statement rings false when, two pages later, he has "the feeling of a boy who thinks of what is happening at a certain hour at the schoolhouse from which he has played truant (p.245." Juggling both worlds in his mind, he cannot wholly accept or repudiate either. Instead, the journey from Caporetto is a strong individual movement

towards a third world view which he must fashion by his own experience. Alone in the midst of chaotic retreat, he comes to realize that movement from escape and return to the social and natural worlds are essential to the maintenance of the individual nature which alone can afford him some degree of heroic mastery.

Henry is soon reunited with Catherine in Stresa, where his escape from the army is re-inforced by her highly individual ethic: "...I get in my own messes(p.246)." She also has "no shame and no honor" concerning the lack of proper forms in her relationship to Henry. Ominous overtones cloud even their happiest time together. By now, Henry realizes that they cannot survive together: the world "kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially(p.249)." Together, they make a heroic escape into Switzerland, overcoming the police authorities and the storms which surround and threaten them externally, but they are carrying the seeds of their inevitable destruction as a unity. For a while, they can survive with their love as "a religious feeling(p.263)" to sustain them.

Certain evidences of social and natural complications intrude on the fantasy-like society of two. Henry and Catherine can never repudiate the social because they are ultimately subject to the natural world, through the

"biological trap." They both try to discard past associations with their fathers, who represent the parent figure and indoctrination of social forms. But the present forces parenthood on them: Catherine is to bear a child, no matter how she repeatedly rebels against herself as a matronly figure. "She was beginning to be a little big with child and she did not want me to see her(p.266)." They cannot live without society--Henry's conscience will demand the social forms of legal marriage, and the child will bring them a position as socializing agents within the social structure.

Life with Catherine means an over-extension of Henry's tendency to live by instinct, and an intrusion of social responsibility. He loses his identity and individual strength as they merge into one another: "My life used to be full of everything...Now if you aren't with me, I haven't a thing in the world(p.257)." As Catherine's bravery reaches a peak in the delivery room, Henry prepares for the trauma by escaping from the nightmarish thoughts of her death into concrete experiences outside of the hospital. Hemingway juxtaposes detailed descriptions of Henry's meals with his deepest thoughts about the death of lover and son. Jumping from the mental realization that "Now Catherine would die" to the physical act of eating ham and eggs, Henry moves about in a pattern as illogical as Catherine's approaching death because "You did not know what it was all about.

You never had time to learn(p.327)."

Lt. Henry approaches a surrender to the naturalistic world in a section of the interior monologue which accompanies his aimless wanderings. Waiting helplessly for Catherine to die, he feels trapped by the omnipresent "they," a nebulous force that determines one's fate arbitrarily. Helpless to save Catherine, he reflects that the only sure thing is death whether or not one plays by the rules. The sense of his own limitations recalls an observation of ants on a burning log of some long ago campfire. The ants are also trapped into a fate they can neither understand nor change. Whether they swarm toward or away from the danger, most of them eventually burn or escape "burnt and flattened(p.327)." Even though he considers saving the ants, Henry foregoes his

...splendid chance to be a Messiah and lift the log off the fire and throw it out where the ants could get off onto the ground. I did not do anything but throw a tin cup of water on the log, so that I would have the cup empty to put whisky in before I added water to it. I think the cup of water on the burning log only steamed the ants. So now I sat out in the hall and waited to hear how Catherine was(p.328).

Henry is at a dangerously low point: this reflection on his own indifference to the ants parallels his sense of the universal indifference to individual fate. Waiting for Catherine to die, he feels as insignificant as the ants steamed by a careless cup of water on a burning log. No matter how one acts, "they kill you in the end." With this

attitude of defeat, Henry is hopelessly trapped in a naturalistic world which places no value on heroic action. Therefore, Henry must escape Catherine, too. He must walk away from the hospital and death, once again out in the rain--one of those images that, like the natural cycles of love and death, you can count on but you cannot understand.

The Hemingway hero transcends heavy-handed, naturalistic determinism through a pattern of escapes which allow him time to mend after each traumatic confrontation with forces that would pinion him. The war zone itself is a glamorous attraction away from his vague midwestern past: "those postcards marked Zona di Guerra would be very fine in America: strange and mysterious(p.36)." His first wound shatters the movie quality of the war and allows him to escape the illusory, game-ridden, officer's club world. Temporary retreat into Catherine's fantasy world allows him to mend sufficiently to return to the real world's society in chaos. The action builds to the climatic retreat from Caporetto. Henry loses his identity in the shambling mass of soldiers, throwing down his arms, his insignias, and fleeing with the massive movement of the countryside. Singled out by representatives of the ever-intruding "they" who seek to destroy him arbitrarily, he escapes a world where his past deeds of bravery cannot save him. Diving into the turbulent

river, he saves himself with his physical skill in this contest with natural elements. Without the uniform that formerly marked his affiliation with men's society, Henry is somewhat lost: "In civilian clothes I felt a masquerader. I had been in uniform a long time and I missed the feeling of being held by your clothes(p.243)." Twice he fails to recognize his mirror image: he retains a sense of masquerading in this other world where his conventional self nags him with thoughts of legal marriage, and baptism for his child, and a sense of truancy from his former life.

The escape into Switzerland provides another contest with natural elements which he and Catherine weather together, earning a few months of dream-like satisfaction. This interlude is overshadowed by Henry's conscience, trained by the socializing process to believe that there must be "a price you pay for sleeping together(p.320)." Catherine and her world are too good to survive and so Henry must escape her, too--he is ultimately a survivor.

Catherine's bravery derives from her belief that "life isn't hard to manage when you've nothing to lose(p.137)." She lives only in her love for Henry, selflessly good and bravely true to her instincts. Henry knows this: he also knows that "the world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break, it kills (p.249)." He cannot live long in Catherine's community of two, because he ultimately feels like a masquerader--"a fake doctor with a beard(p.319)"--in her world. He cannot share her

courageous denial of all the forms of conventional morality. While she dies, he even falls back on a vague sort of prayer: "Oh, God, please don't let her die. I'll do anything for you if you won't let her die(p.330)." He blames their "sin" for her death, he claims "I had no religion but I knew the baby ought to have been baptized (p.327)." Torn between the natural, instinctive world of Catherine and the proscriptive world of social institutions, Henry has only the instinct for survival to guide his behavior.

Never quite able to repudiate society, Henry weathers the conflict of instinct and conscience by periodic escape which gives him time to "mend in the broken places," through strong, individual action. If there can be heroism in a naturalistic world, Lt. Henry is a hero because he is superior to the forces that threaten him—he survives. In crisis, he struggles to maintain the privacy in which he realizes his image of himself through his own skill and courage.²⁸ Rendered tough and indifferent by collisions with the world, he retains a certain sensitivity and access to some source of strength, along with the realization that he cannot understand those natural forces with the pat answers that society allows him. Neither unscarred nor pure, he yet grasps an individual code underlying society and nature and uses it to keep himself afloat in the midst of surrounding chaos. Constantly aware that omnipresent death makes

all human life tragic, he attempts to face the tragedy stoically. One cannot imagine Lt. Henry believing in any "special providence in the fall of a sparrow": for this source of strength, he must substitute an instinctual appreciation of the good things his world does provide for convalescence and survival. Tempering his life with workable elements from social and instinctual worlds, he forms a viable, individual ethic which allows him to survive in a naturalistic world.

FOOTNOTES

1

Ernest Hemingway, A Moveable Feast (New York:Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1964), p.29.

²Ibid., p.31.

3

Ibid., p.30.

4

Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds:An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1956), p.253.

5

Nathaniel Hawthorne, Passages From the American Notebooks (Boston:Houghton-Mifflin and Company, 1903), p.484.

6

Charles Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism:A Divided Stream (Minneapolis:University of Minnesota Press, 1956), p.8.

7

Lillian Furst and Peter Skrine, Naturalism (Norfolk, England:Cox and Wyman, Ltd., 1971), p.11.

8

Haskell Block, Naturalistic Triptych:The Fictive and the Real in Zola, Mann, and Dreiser (New York:Random House, 1970)p.4.

9

Emile Zola, Le Roman Experimental (Paris:Bernouard, 1929, p.166.

10

Emile Zola, preface to Therese Raquin in Furst, op. cit., p.29.

11

Ibid., p.25.

12

Emile Zola, "Life in the Raw," trans.L.W. Taucock in Realism, Naturalism, and Symbolism:Modes of Thought and Expression in Europe, ed. Roland Stromberg (New York:Harper and Row, 1968), p. 120.

13

Block, op.cit., p.5.

14

Furst, op.cit., p.9.

15

Ibid., p. 8.

- ¹⁶Walcutt, op.cit., p.12.
- ¹⁷Joseph Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel (New York:The Century Co., 1932), p.331.
- ¹⁸Philip Rahv, "Notes on the Decline of Naturalism," in Critiques and Essays on Modern Fiction, ed. John Aldridge (New York:Ronald Press Co., 1952). p.418.
- ¹⁹Ibid., p.421.
- ²⁰Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (New York: Charles Scribner's & Sons, 1929),p.13. Hereafter, quotations from the text will be cited by a parenthetical page reference.
- ²¹Richard Hovey, The Inward Terrain (Seattle:University of Washington Press, 1968), p.88.
- ²²Leo Gurko, Ernest Hemingway and the Pursuit of Heroism (New York:Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1968), p.102.
- ²³Malcolm Cowley, "Hemingway and the Hero," in New Republic, CXI(4 Dec.,1944), p.756.
- ²⁴Caroline Gordon, "Notes on Hemingway and Kafka." in Sewanee Review, LVII(April-June, 1949), p.218.
- ²⁵Cowley, op.cit., p.756.
- ²⁶Arthur Mizener, The Sense of Life in the Modern Novel (Boston:Houghton-Mifflin, Co., 1964), p.207.

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