

Aspects of Two Modern Loves in *A Farewell to Arms* and *Couples*

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1

Both *A Farewell to Arms* and *Couples* are stories of two sexual loves. Hemingway's is at first glance a traditional romantic love story. A pair of lovers escape from the general struggles of war in order to gain a perfect union with each other. But the union of Frederick Henry and Catherine is indeed accomplished in heaven free from limitations or inequalities of an ordinary marriage. As in the conventional tradition of romantic love, they are divided halves of a personality when they are apart. And of course this makes their separation by Catherine's death in the final scene all the more painful. But the various couples in Updike's novel always remain couples in their lovemakings whether the relationship is jealous and dissatisfied or sweet and tender. This appears intensely and lyrically in the detailed descriptions of sexual acts. Such lyricism never reduces one lover's appreciation of the performance of the other:

...“for of those conversations of tranced bodies there is little distinct to recall, only the companionable slow ascent to moon-blanchéd plateaus, where pantomimes of eating and killing and dying are enacted, both sides taking all parts. He found Marcia kittenish, then tigerish, then curiously abstract and cool and mechanical, and finally, afterwards, very grateful and tender and talkative and sticky.”...⁽¹⁾

The emphasis, even in the moment of passion, is not on union, but on companionship: in short, on how one person finds another. Therefore there is no assurance of permanent selves which might guarantee a unity of relationship. And even though one of the women in *Couples* has some striking and apparently unique quality in the sensual act, the effect of experiencing it on the part of her lover or husband is to keep it in isolation and regard it as separate. This is the case with the sexuality of Angela. Her husband, Piet Hanema, can never accept it though he moves temporarily from one affair to another:

She pulled his hair, *Come up*. "Come inside me?" He realised, amazed, he who had entered Foxy Whitman the afternoon before, that there was no cunt like Angela's none so liquorish and replete. He lost himself to the hilt unresisted. The keenness of her chemistry made him whimper. Always the problem with their sex had been that he found her too rich to manipulate. She touched his matted chest, *wait*, and touched her own self, and mixed with her fluttering fingers, coming like a comet's dribble, he waited until her hand flew to his buttocks and urging him to kill her, she gasped and absolved herself with tension.⁽²⁾

The sexual comparison here shows a certain intellectual distance during love-making. And this aspect of love in the novel is also basis of the double adultery of the Smiths and the Applebys, Harold and Marcia, Frank and Janet, "the Applesmiths" as the members of the circle come to call them. At first Marcia and Frank are deceiving Harold and Janet and then when Janet becomes suspicious she throws herself upon Harold. She does this in the laundry-room, when she is able to convince him that the others have gone away. But she acts thus not to revenge herself on her husband, but to avoid being left out of the quartet:

Janet wished powerfully not to be frigid. All her informal education, from Disney's *Snow White* to last week's *Life*, had taught her to place the high-

est value on love. Nothing but a kiss undid the wicked apple. We move from birth to death amid a crowd of others and the name of the parade is love. However unideal it was, she dreaded being left behind. Hence she could not stop flirting, could not stop reaching out, though something distrustful within her, a bitterness like a residue from her father's medicinal factory, had to be circumvented by each motion of her heart. Liquor aided the manoeuvre.⁽³⁾

So love for the partners in *Couples* involves the membership of a group or the society to which all the couples belong. This is the select, self-created society of the small group who have made their homes in the seaside place of Tarbox. The society is formed not by status, but by free choice and taste, and only by money within certain obvious limits. In fact it gains an expression of "secularized spirituality"⁽⁴⁾ which characterizes a private life in the modern world.

Therefore the Applebys and the Smiths and their affairs are described in extraordinary detail, particularly during their period of adultery till Harold and Janet, drawn into the quartet, have the final break-up of their relations. That plot involves the love affair of Piet Hanema and Foxy Whitman, and it includes Piet's earlier relationship with Georgene Thorne, which is linked to the Piet—Foxy affair inevitably. After all, this affair increases and concentrates the hatred Georgene's husband, Freddy Thorne has for Piet, once he has become suspicious. And it is Georgene and Freddy Thorne who reveal Foxy's unfaithfulness to her husband and arrange for her to have an abortion of Piet's child. The abortion is also the dramatic crisis in the book. This implies that Foxy and Piet are also involved deeply in the social world of the couples. So Piet—Foxy crisis and near-tragedy has to be seen against Tarbox's way of life of cosy companionship filled with deceit and sophistication.

In any way the Applesmiths are examined at this length because they are a microcosm of the complex Tarbox society which composes the world of *Couples*. They are more comic because they are only

puppets, dancing to the tune of the social patterns they belong to. The significant thing about the relations of the Applesmiths is that they continue to sleep with their spouses as well as their lovers. There is no question of breaking the social pattern. The following passage shows the solidarity of a new society based on “secularized spirituality,” and it is of course not necessarily connected with the adulterous world of Tarbox. The soldairity of freedom to which its individual members adapt themselves is the main feature, and this is not only to remind us that the society described is a purely contemporary phenomenon. But also, if we focus on this point it is sure that its subject is characters’ blind involvement with this society, not just the effects of love, marriage, and betrayal as they might have been experienced in novels of the nineteenth century :

... to this new world the Applebys and little-Smiths brought a modest determination to be free, to be flexible and decent. Fenced off from their own parents by nursemaids and tutors and “help,” they would personally rear large intimate families; they changed diapers with their own hands, they did their own housework and home repairs, gardened and shovelled snow with a sense of strengthened health. Chauffered, as children, in black Packards and Chryslers, they drove second-hand cars in an assortment of candy colours. Exiled early to boarding schools, they resolved to use and improve the public schools. Having suffered under their parents’ rigid marriages and formalized evasions they sought to substitute an essential fidelity set in a matrix of easy and open companionship among couples. For the forms of the country-club they substituted informal membership in a circle of friends and participation in a cycle of parties and games. They put behind them the stratified summer towns of their upbringings with their restrictive distinctions ... and settled in unthought-of places, in pastoral mill-towns like Tarbox, and tried to improvise here a fresh way of life. Duty and work yielded as ideas to truth and fun. Virtue was no longer sought in temple of market place but in the home—one’s own home, and then in the homes of one’s friends.⁽⁵⁾

The keynote of this ideal is faithfulness within such a context of freedom as open companionship among couples. So, the problem for Piet, Angela and Foxy, involving all the other couples is not their desire to be unfaithful but their continued pleasure in remaining faithful at the same time. It is a matter of desire and pleasure not of agreement with the legal bonds of a conventional institution as in the husband — wife — lover triangle in the nineteenth century's novels.

Then there are still five other couples, the Guerins, the Constantines, the Ongs, the Salzes, and the Gallaghers. The Salzes and the Constantines have a relationship similar to that of the Applesmiths though we learn less about theirs. Piet is also involved at different times with Marcia, with Bea Guerin and with Carol Constantine. Angela and Ken remain loyal to their respective partners. Terry Gallagher, the wife of Piet's partner in his firm of architects is once seen at the beach with an elderly man, her pottery teacher. These interwoven episodes are placed socially and personally in referential way and have the remarkable effect of making various sensual happenings real and objective. And each character is placed in the same position as the observer of such an ambiguous incident in a cosy world to which he is connected. With careful neutrality each character presents us with an immense photograph of fragments of real life, or allows us to overhear a lengthy recording of conversation as television news reports can teach us. So the commenting, explaining and all-mighty author seems absent here. Of course, we are used to his significant absences. However ambitious we may be about an narrative way of realistic fiction, we are familiar with this absence of authorial interpretation or commitment. It has the effect of mixing couples in Tarbox with the modern world. They merge imperceptibly into their total background of contemporary society.

2

Unlike the couples of Tarbox, Frederick and Catherine, the single

pair in *A Farewell to Arms*, enjoy their love in a complete isolation from other people. Though the Tarbox couples have the freedom of an affluent, peaceful society, Catherine and Frederick, as nurse and officer in an ambulance unit, are subject to danger and threat of death. But they retreat into themselves away from the war to enjoy a self-contained relationship. This can be seen even on snatched meetings in the hospital ward at night in Milan. When they go to the race meeting at San Siro with Frederick's friends they remain somehow apart. Everyone, from Dr. Valentini who examines Frederick's shattered leg to the various hotel servants, inevitably regards them as a pair of lovers. The course of the novel traces the development of this isolation and leads to their complete withdrawal from society and the war. After Frederick has returned to the front he is caught up in the Caporetto offensive. In short, he becomes a deserter from being a fugitive and makes what he calls his 'separate peace'. The apparent reason for this is the incident during the retreat on the bridge over the Tagliamento: the Italian battle police are shooting all officers without trial on the suspicion that they have abandoned their men. Frederick escapes by jumping into the river. Self-preservation leads him to desertion, and the incident at the bridge is only a dramatic occasion for it. Escaping on the floor of an ammunition car he meditates:

'You had lost your cars and your men as a floorwalker loses the stock of his department in a fire. There was, however, no insurance. You were out of it now. You had no more obligation. If they shot floorwalkers after a fire in the department... then certainly the floorwalkers would not be expected to return when the store opened for business.'⁽⁶⁾

But in the same passage he dreams of lying with Catherine on the floor of the car. So far their love has been marked by their inequality of commitment. It had begun as a casual love affair on his part, as an immediate commitment to total love on hers. This is shown in

the contrast between her 'Darling, do be good to me, we are going to have a strange life',⁽⁷⁾ at the very beginning, and his inward comment a few hours later that he thinks he is probably a little crazy but he does not care what he is learning by experience. Then he is prepared to accept that, in her words:

'this is a rotten game they have been playing,'⁽⁸⁾

After he returns to Gorizia wounded, his attitude has certainly changed. But their relationship is still characterized by her total surrender and her desire to do what he wants. Now Frederick's expression of need for her equalizes the balance. One aspect of his 'separate peace' is simply a desire to run away to her. But the rejection of the society that has made the war has been growing within him. On the slopes of the Bainsizza, before the attack when the shell hits him, Frederick expresses his hatred of the falsifications of a prolonged war:

I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and the sacrifices, and the expression in vain. We had heard them, sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that only the shouted words came through, and had read them on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time, and I had seen nothing sacred, and the things that were glorious had no glory, and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it. There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything.⁽⁹⁾

After the crisis of his decision to desert, Frederick's rejection of the war is not easily to be separated from his need for Catherine. At the time of their meeting Catherine had already reached a point of disillusion with the war similar to his. She has lost the man to whom

she was engaged on the Somme. She has given up her former romantic notions of seeing her fiance brought to her hospital, a hero with his head in a bandage, and continues to nurse merely to keep herself going, mechanically :

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘People can’t realize what France is like. If they did it couldn’t all go on. He didn’t have a sabre cut.’ They blew him all to bits.’⁽¹⁰⁾

This suffering separates both Catherine and Frederick from the less sensitive persons around them who continue to accept the war. Their isolation becomes a complete withdrawal after all. They escape by boat across Lake Como to neutral Switzerland, but in their security there is always a fear. Because nothing but death can touch them now, they are more acutely aware of the presence of death. Especially Catherine is afraid sometimes when the rain is falling as a premonition of the rain that falls incessantly as she lies dying from a haemorrhage :

‘We really are the same one and we mustn’t misunderstand on purpose.’

‘We won’t.’

‘But people do. They love each other and they misunderstand on purpose and they fight and then suddenly they aren’t the same one.’

‘We won’t fight.’

‘We mustn’t. Because there’s only us two and in the world there’s all the rest of them. If anything comes between us we’re gone and then they have us.’⁽¹¹⁾

When Frederick is returning to the front from Milan, Catherine accompanies him to the station. They see a soldier and his girl embracing by one of the stone buttresses of the cathedral. Frederick says ‘They’re like us,’ but Catherine replies, ‘Nobody is like us,’ and Frederick in his role as a narrator adds ‘She did not mean it hap-

pily.¹²³ In the hotel at Stresa before the police come searching for him they escape across the lake at night. At that point Frederick has attained full equality with Catherine in acceptance of their love :

Often a man wishes to be alone and a girl wishes to be alone too and if they love each other they are jealous of that in each other, but I can truly say we never felt that. We could feel alone when we were together, alone against the others... If people bring so much courage to this world, the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them.¹²³

No longer involved in society, neutral in a neutral country, and cut off by the surrounding snow in the bedroom of the hotel in Montreux, they reach the climax of their isolation in a warm embrace. Their sexual union has reached a stage where sexual separation is overcome and they can aim at recapturing the unity of the original hermaphrodite.

In *Couples* Piet and Foxy are not just another couple. Their adultery takes on more serious dimensions. It ultimately divides them from the other couples and therefore brings them into a stage of separation like that achieved by Frederick Henry and Catherine when they escape across the lake. Only their end is not a tragic one though it involves social rejection and the loss of friends. Catherine dies and Foxy lives to marry Piet after her divorce. Before that, however, they have come near to tragedy when Foxy has an abortion of Piet's child. The love of both couples is at once threatened by biological risk. The fact Catherine has her child, while Foxy successfully gets rid of hers, does not really distinguish the situation of one from the other. In either case their reaction to the pregnancy is at first one of fear and resentment. They toy with fancies of what their children might look like if they were born. Especially, Catherine and Frederick let the pregnancy take its course because they are in a position to do so without a wall of social impossibility. In both cases the pregnancy draws a man and a woman together. Frederick is not

really moved by the death of the child with his mother, and Piet thinks only of Foxy during and after the abortion. Earlier, when Catherine first tells Frederick she is pregnant, they sit apart uneasily for a time:

‘I was looking at her but we did not touch each other. We were apart as when someone comes into a room and people are self-conscious.’⁽⁶⁴⁾

There is some correspondence with Foxy’s words to Piet in *Couples*.

‘Nature is so stupid. It has all my maternal glands working, do you know what that means, Piet? You know what the great thing about being pregnant I found out was? ... You’re never alone. When you have a baby inside you are not alone.’⁽⁶⁵⁾

Therefore there is a resentment on the part of both pairs of lovers in their enclosed world against the generation which would fix them in time sequence and biological cycle. At the beginning of *Couples* we see Georgene, Piet’s first mistress giving herself to him and saying, ‘Welcome to the post-pill paradise.’⁽⁶⁶⁾ It is a paradise from which Piet and Foxy are rudely sent away. The child symbolizes an acceptance of risk which separates them from the easy-going conformity of the couples of Tarbox who play a game according to very strict rules, as Catherine and Frederick have chosen to take no part in the war and the crucial games played by other people. In both books the pregnancy is a trap to confine and even to destroy the lovers. Catherine is doomed to die in childbirth:

‘Yes, but what if she should die? She can’t die. Why would she die? What reason is there for her to die? There’s just a child that has to be born and then you look after it and get fond of it maybe. But what if she should die? She won’t die.’⁽⁶⁷⁾

The child becomes at once a burden on their mutual pleasure. She does die, and the effect of her death, coming as the climax of the novel, is twofold. It is peculiarly terrible and shocking because Frederick can not join her in death. In this romantic union against the world we are prepared for the tragic satisfaction of seeing the lovers die together. But this is denied to Frederick Henry. The perfection of their love-making is betrayed by death. He thrusts the nurses out of the room, but with the dead Catherine now it is "like saying good-bye to a statue".⁽¹⁸⁾ Their love recedes from him like a tide: "After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain."⁽¹⁹⁾ This atmosphere of 'absence, darkness, death' at the end of the novel leads on to a second effect. It alters our perspective over the whole course of the previous action and particularly over the final chapters, the movement from Milan to Stresa, to Switzerland, the escape of Frederick and Catherine. It brings into full light the fears and the despairs that have covered the narrative just like Catherine's fear of the rain at night which is later associated with her haemorrhage. Now their escape can be seen as an escape towards death and the idyllic interludes in Montreux cannot postpone the climax for long. And it is Frederick's deprivation of love. Life takes everything away :

That was what you did. You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you ... you could count on that. Stay around and they would kill you.⁽²⁰⁾

3

It is interesting here to note that in *A Farewell to Arms* there is the world of male violence which Frederick shares with his friend the medical officer Rinaldi and the other Italian officers in the mess. They torment a priest from the Abruzzi who talks to Frederick about

the love of God and foresees his own love :

‘But there in my country it is understood a man may love God. It is not a dirty joke ... What you tell me about in the nights. That is not love ...’

‘I don’t love.’

‘You will, I know you will. Then you will be happy.’²²¹

And the world of male rudeness serves the same role in the narrative as the world of the Tarbox couples. It is the background against which the difference of Catherine-Frederick and Foxy-Piet is clearly outlined. And besides it is noteworthy that just as Hemingway’s hero is closer than his Italian friends to the values of the priest, so Piet and Foxy, Episcopalian and Congregationalist are the only two members of the Tarbox couples who go regularly to church. Piet retains the Dutch Calvinist faith of his childhood because of his parents’ early death in an accident :

“Piet wondered what barred him from the ranks of those many dead who believed nothing. Courage, he supposed. His nerve had cracked when his parents died. To break with a faith requires a moment of courage and courage is a kind of margin within us, and after his parents’ death Piet had no margin.”²²²

It is their sharp sense of mortality which inclines both Piet and Frederick to religious belief, however desperate their gestures in this direction may seem. There is a splendid melancholy scene with the very ancient Count Greffi after the game of billiards :

“We none of us know about the soul. Are you *Croyant*?”

“At night ...”

“I had expected to become more devout as I grow older but somehow I haven’t,” he said, “It is a great pity.”²²³

And Piet "places his children in Christendom"²⁴ as Updike phrases it and as he sees his daughter Ruth singing in the children's choir, "his blood shouted *Lord* and his death leaned above him like a perfectly clear plate of glass."²⁵ Their ill-assured religious belief makes them capable of the tragic sense of life and this in turn drives them dangerously towards the point of tragedy in their own lives.

By the way, Freddy Thorne, the enemy of Piet and Foxy, has much to say about death because of Piet's affair with Georgene. It doesn't seem that his attitude is at all the same as Piet's. This is not surprising if we consider that they are posed in contrast to each other in the novel so as to produce an almost melodramatic opposition. Freddy is a hairless clown patronized by the Tarbox wives but not a lover of any of them as Piet is. The final turn of the plot is a piece of mere melodrama. Freddy obtains an abortionist for Piet and Foxy, but his condition for doing this and maintaining secrecy is that Piet should arrange for him to sleep for one night with Piet's wife Angela whom he had long admired. Piet and Angela are willing to go along with such a request though Freddy's impotence helps to make his humiliation of Piet only partial. However, the episode completes the destruction of the Hanemas' marriage.

Freddy's metaphysical opinions, often inflicted on his friends and particularly on the Tarbox wives at the Tarbox evening parties, spring from his professional position as a dentist. He is a specialist in rot and decay, keeping the dirty secrets of the whole community. He sees death everywhere, but it is the inevitable corruption of people and the world, not a threat to life as in Hemingway's characters and in Piet. It is significant that Freddy identifies God with death while Piet identifies him with the world. For Piet and Frederick death is coming in from outside inevitably, as an open challenge to be resisted with dignity. Freddy internalizes death, for him the corruption is inwards:

You never get your own smile back when you lose your teeth. Imagine the horseshit a doctor handling cancer has to hand out. Jesus, the year I was in med. school I saw skeletons talking about getting better. The funny fact is you don't get better, and nobody gives a cruddy crap in hell. You're born to get laid and die, and the sooner the better, Carol, you're right about the nifty machine we begin with: the trouble is, it runs only one way. Downhill.²⁸

And on his disastrous night with Angela, the one time he seems to be near success is when he is sexually excited by something in his own nonsensical monologue:

“Every meal we eat breaks down the enamel.”

“Hey. You're gotten bigger.”

“Death excites me. Death is being screwed by God. It'll be delicious.”²⁹

In spite of this, it is not always consistent and possible to treat his statements as a counterpointing to Piet's search for meaning in work and love. Often he speaks about death, but he seems to become aware of the implications in the life of the couples more clearly than is possible for any other individual member of the Tarbox society. There are occasions when Freddy's despair sees further and he understands well Piet's separateness from the others and that he is doing better than Piet does himself:

“People are the only thing people have left since God packed up.”³⁰

This is what the whole book is saying and Freddy then becomes the major spokesman of its meaning. In this passage his humanism looks alongside Piet's and Foxy's interpretation of the same problem. Of course the thought of death is not delicious for Catherine or Frederick or Piet or Foxy, though it is often present. But an acceptance of a religious factor may be due to the fear of death on Piet's and their

part :

“Piet. What will the world do to us?”

“Is it God or the world you care about?”

“You think of them as different? I think of them as the same.

“Maybe that’s what I mean to say when you’re perverse.”²³

And another example of this might be a passage late in the novel when Piet’s affair has come to a crisis and Angela is leaving him: “he believed that there was, behind the screen of couples and houses and days, a Calvinist God who lifts us up and casts us down in utter freedom, without recourse to our prayers or consultation with our wills.”²⁴ As in this passage, Piet feels those life forces in himself which he recognizes as God or the world. In short, his vision consists of a splendid dynamism, with all its tragedy of man caught in the universal pains, as symbolized by the steady impersonal erosion of enamel in Freddy’s vision. And his comfort to Foxy when he hears about the abortion finally finds expression in a metaphor from carpentry: “In the illusion of giving advice he found some shelter, right angles and stress beams of sense they could inhabit.”²⁵ And Piet is helping his workmen to arrange cedar shingles over insulating foil for the ranch-style houses on Indian Hill:

“The cedar had an ancient fragrance; the method of aligning the shingles, by snapping a string rubbed with chalk, was agreeably primitive.”²⁶

We may compare here the description of the house in Montreux in *A Farewell to Arms*, with its porch, plain wooden walls, big store, box of logs and general plainness and honesty. Piet insists on waterproofing the foundations which takes at least a day, and refuses his assistant Jazinski who says that if they omitted this job nobody would be any the wiser. He almost falls into the image of decaying roots which is always present with Freddy, but Piet is trying to support

his foundations, just as in his memory of his Dutch parents and upbringing he comes to terms with his past. And Piet is trying to build a house for Foxy. In their dedication to workmanship, as in their religious sense, their attitude to death, Piet and Foxy reach out to a meaningless world and resemble in this point Frederick and Catherine and other Hemingway characters. But above all other parallels, the resemblance lies in their commitment to the risk of love:

In leaving the limits of Tarbox they had acquired a perspective; their friends and their houses seemed small behind them. Only they, Foxy, and Piet, were life-size. Only they had ceased flirting with life and permitted themselves to be brought, through biology, to this intensity of definition.³³

On the contrary, the Tarbox couples only go through the motions of having jobs. Because they hope to enjoy fully the protected space of the private life in which they have cushioned themselves against the world. When Carol Constantine says she thinks Piet's houses are hideous she creates a shock because Piet and Foxy have broken one of the unwritten laws of the community. And Georgene also says with angry consciousness that they should move out of Tarbox because they have poisoned the air, but thinks that Piet "had brought her word of a world where vegetation was heraldic and every woman was some man's queen...like the marsh seen through the windows, where grasses prospered in salty mud which would kill her kind of useful plant."³⁴ Thus an ambition of Piet and Foxy has been cut down to the size of the Tarbox pattern. They have been forced back into the limited warmth of the private life from a meaningless world beyond the ring of couples. As in an earlier episode, again the lasting sadness of a late Sunday afternoon in Tarbox begins to swallow up them:

... an evening when marriages closed in upon themselves like flowers from

which the sun is withdrawn, and an evening giving like a smeared window on Monday and the long week when they must perform again their impersonation of working men, of stockbrokers and dentists and engineers, of mothers and housekeepers, of adults who are not the world's guests but its hosts.⁸⁵

This essay has traced a single theme from the comparison of the two novels: the separation of a pair of lovers and their values from the world of war and the world of couples. The difficulty would here seem to be that there is a great contrast between war and peace, between people in the middle of a military campaign in 1917 and people in a professional suburbia in Massachusetts in 1964. But it may be overcome by the separation of the Tarbox characters from the social and political world which surrounds them but which they are powerless to control. They are caught in the webs of impersonal forces as much as Catherine and Frederick are done in the machine of war:

Television brought them the outer world. The little screen's icy brilliance implied a universe of profound cold beyond the warm encirclement of Tarbox, friends, and family. Mirrors established in New York and Los Angeles observed the uninhabitable surface between them and beamed the children's faces in a poisonous, flickering blue. This poison was their national life. Not since Korea had Piet cared about the news. News happened to other people.⁸⁶

Just as Frederick hears or reads in the paper of retreats and offensives, or watches the mountain front through his glasses, so the terrors of peace that is more like war make an impact on the Tarbox community. Pope John dies, Quang Duc sacrifices himself, Valentine Tereshkova becomes the first woman in space, Profumo resigns, and the Lord's Prayer is banned in American public schools. Fashion is carefully noted as the deep décolletage of the fall of that year. And the climax of contemporary history is, of course, the assassination of

Kennedy. A newspaper headline seen on the kitchen floor when Piet finds the children's dead hamster says KENNEDY CRACKS DOWN ON STEEL. There is talk with the children of Jackie Kennedy's baby. As the year of the action of the story is completed and brought round to mid-May, again Piet hears a transistor playing Bob Dylan on the Tarbox beach and thinks :

“Rock is out ... love and peace are in.”⁽¹⁾

And it is only Piet and Foxy who tried to get away from the terrors of peace, as Catherine and Frederick escaped themselves from the war. They still feel a closeness to Kennedy because they regard him as one of themselves. He becomes a martyr and a memory because of his “sense of flair”.⁽²⁾ Foxy has an argument with a New York intellectual who thinks that “the sense of flair” might have betrayed him into “blowing the whole game”.⁽³⁾ She writes sadly to Piet that if Kennedy was not fit to rule them then they are not fit to rule themselves, “so bring on emperors, demigods, giant robots, what have you.”⁽⁴⁾

But now that one attempt has failed Piet has a golf date with Eddie Constantine at the height of the Cuba crisis and they decide not to cancel it. Foxy also hears the news over the radio while she is having a tooth filled by Freddy Thorne. Of course, Freddy, too decides not to cancel the party he had been going to hold that night for the Tarbox couples. The couples begin to re-draw together in a conspiracy to protect themselves from death. It is time to make a ‘separate peace’ for Piet and Foxy as it was for Frederick and Catherine.

Notes

(1) John Updike, *Couples*, André Deutsch, New York, 1968, p. 121.

(2) *ibid.*, p. 194.

(3) *ibid.*, p. 177.

- (4) Lionel Trilling, *The Opposing Self*, Secker and Warburg, 1955, p. 228.
- (5) John Updike, *Couples*, André Deutsch, New York, 1968, p. 106.
- (6) Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, A Triad Panther Book, London, 1977, p. 167.
- (7) *ibid*, p. 24.
- (8) *ibid*, p. 27.
- (9) *ibid*, p. 133.
- (10) *ibid*, p. 19.
- (11) *ibid*, pp. 102-3.
- (12) *ibid*, p. 108.
- (13) *ibid*, p. 178.
- (14) *ibid*, p. 102.
- (15) John Updike, *Couples*, André Deutsch, New York, 1968, p. 360.
- (16) *ibid*, p. 52.
- (17) Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, A Triad Panther Book, London, 1977, p. 227.
- (18) *ibid*, p. 236.
- (19) *ibid*, p. 236.
- (20) *ibid*, p. 232.
- (21) *ibid*, pp. 56-7.
- (22) John Updike, *Couples*, André Deutsch, New York, 1968, p. 20.
- (23) *ibid*, p. 186.
- (24) *ibid*, p. 20.
- (25) *ibid*, p. 20.
- (26) *ibid*, pp. 241-2.
- (27) *ibid*, p. 370.
- (28) *ibid*, p. 250.
- (29) *ibid*, p. 203.
- (30) *ibid*, p. 415.
- (31) *ibid*, p. 340.
- (32) *ibid*, p. 221.
- (33) *ibid*, p. 342.
- (34) *ibid*, p. 384.
- (35) *ibid*, p. 74.
- (36) *ibid*, p. 214.

- ⑳) *ibid.*, p. 439.
㉑) *ibid.*, p. 449.
㉒) *ibid.*, p. 449.
㉓) *ibid.*, p. 449.

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