CHAPTER - II
FIRST ESSAY IN THE TRAGIC

Based on A Farewell to Arms
Ernest Miller Hemingway blew most of his head off with a favourite shotgun in the year 1961. It is interesting to note that Hemingway's father had also ended his life in a similar shocking manner. Perhaps his father's unnatural death left a deep psychological scar in Ernest's mind or it may have been his numerous confrontations with death which had led him to write stories containing a deep sense of the tragic. Tragedy pervades almost his entire writings. It appears that he seemed to have been pre-occupied with death, — in all its various forms. And nowhere is this tragic sense of life more aptly portrayed than in his novels, A Farewell to Arms, For Whom The Bell Tolls and The Old Man And The Sea, — in all probability three of Hemingway's finest works. All these novels pit man against the imperilled human situation and though the novels end on a note of sadness and unnecessary waste, it also carries with it a positive aspect. Despite the unseen hostile and the unbeatable odds he is confronted with, man is shown as struggling and acting with "grace under pressure".
Hemingway's sense of the tragic can be examined by making a close scrutiny of his above mentioned novels. One may begin with the study of *A Farewell To Arms*, the earliest of them.

It is through Frederick Henry that Hemingway tells the story of *A Farewell To Arms*. The story is told in the first person. Henry was an American citizen before the start of the first World war. At the outbreak of the war he was drafted into the Italian army and placed in charge of a small ambulance unit with the rank of Lieutenant. He was detailed to serve the forces fighting in the Austro-Italian front. Henry was selected in spite of his being a foreigner because "I was in Italy"," and I spoke Italian."¹

Initially Henry's attitude to the war was a big fun. To him war was no more serious than the mock fight in the movies, for "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."² The battle-field in his view was the hunting-ground for glory-hunters, the arena where one could show one's manliness, daring, skill and courage.

¹ *A Farewell To Arms* - Ernest Hemingway
² Penguin Books. p 21
² Ibid. p 33
It was true that he had had enough experience of the callous brutalities of the war in which people suffer without reason. Soldiers were tired of the war as it had drawn them away from the serenity and joy of their homes. They even inflicted wounds on themselves so as to escape being sent to the battle-front. Like a pestilence war had seized one and all without exception but Henry felt sure he would not be killed in that war. When however, an Austrian shell lands in the dug-out in which he was sheltering, injuring him seriously, he was rudely awakened and the myths he had so strongly believed in were shattered. He becomes totally disillusioned with the war in which he was engaged.

When he returned to his unit after the expiry of his leave period, he was haunted with the idea that his life was devoid of any meaning. Everything had seemed to be in good condition and his absence had made no difference. It evidently made no difference whether I was there to look after things or not. I had imagined that, the condition of the cars, whether or not things were obtainable, the smooth functioning of the business of removing wounded and sick from the dressing stations, hauling them back from the mountains to the clearing-station and then distributing them to the hospitals named on their
papers, depended to a considerable extent on myself. Evidently it did not matter whether I was there or not. "3 The whole thing seemed to run better while I was away. "4 This feeling of futility of his having joined the war also gave him a false feeling of soldiering. And during the retreat he ceased to be a spectator but became an active participant. He had seen Aymo, one of his ambulance drivers, trip and fall face down; " Two more shots came from the thick bush and Aymo, as he was crossing the tracks, lurched, tripped and fell face down. "5 The three of us squatted over him in the rain. He was hit low in the back of the neck and the bullet had ranged upward and come out under the right eye. He died while I was stopping up the two holes. "$ They were Germans" he had said. " There can't be any Germans over there." $ Those were Italians that shot, they weren't Germans." 6 The lamentable nature of the situation horrified him when he realised that it was an Italian bullet, not that of a German, that sent the ill-fated man, Aymo, hurtling to his death. He had also seen that Bonello preferred being taken a prisoner than to go on fighting. He had also witnessed with horror the inhuman and callousness characteristics of war when the battle-police killed every officer on suspicion of deserting his unit. It

3. Ibid. p 16
4. Ibid. p 17
5. Ibid. p 166
6. Ibid. p 166
was around that time that he came to the conclusion that it was no longer his war where the establishment like the battle-police was indifferent to the lot of the men they dealt with. This feeling was further aggravated when, he personally faced the battle-police who mistook him for a German in Italian uniform. To escape being tortured or even done to death, he had jumped into the Taglamento river. "Anger was washed away in the river along with any obligation. ---- I was through. --- it was not my show anymore." 7 He had signed a separate peace and he could no longer be bothered with the ruthless war. He had said goodbye to it and all the organisations conducting it. His brief association with it had disclosed to him its inhuman character and the insentiently stony attitude of the establishment. He realised that the only noble and commendable way out for him was to cut himself aloof from it and go after some other benevolent pursuit or to devote himself to someone who would make his life more profitable and meaningful.

The person to whom he now turned was his beloved Catherine Barkley. Initially he had had no intention to love her or to fall in love with her. His only

7. Ibid. p 181
desire had been to take advantage of her situation, and amuse himself at her expense, - " I thought she was probably a little crazy. It was all right if she was. I did not care what I was getting into. This was better than going to the house for officers where the girls climbed all over you and put your cap on backwards as a sign of affection between their trips upstairs with brother officers. I knew I did not love Catherine Barkley nor had any idea of loving her. This was a game, like bridge, in which you said things instead of playing cards. Like bridge, you had to pretend you were playing for money or playing for some stakes. Nobody had mentioned what the stakes were. It was all right with me."8 But later on, immediately after his escapade with the military police, his true feelings for her surfaced and he was made aware that, "I was not made to think. I was made to eat. My God, yes. Eat and drink and sleep with Catherine."9

Having got away from the battle-front and in the company of Catherine he " did not want to read about the war. I was going to forget the war. I had made a separate peace."10 He had told her " Do'nt talk about the war. The war was a long way away. Maybe there was'nt any war. There was no war here. Then I realised it was over for me. But

8. Ibid. p 28
9. Ibid. p 181
10. Ibid. p 188
I did not have the feeling that it was really over. I had the feeling of a boy who thinks of what is happening at a certain hour at the schoolhouse from which he has played truant." ¹¹

Catherine's death in child-birth in a hospital in Lausanne brought to him the realisation that only death was the ultimate reality. Some were killed in the war, some by disease and some just died. He came to the conclusion that, they threw an individual in and told him the rules to be observed by him as combatant and the first time they caught him off base, they killed him, without compassion or compunction, not caring to ascertain the reason or cause or the circumstances responsible for his conduct. They killed him in the end. As he had himself reflected sitting in the corridor of the hospital, "Poor little kid. --- Still there would not be all this dying to go through. Now Catherine would die. 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. Or they killed you gratuitously like Aymo. Or gave you the syphilis like Rinaldi. But they killed you in the end. You could count on that. Stay around and they would kill you." ¹²

¹¹. Ibid. pp 189, 190
¹². Ibid. pp 151, 152
In a philosophical bent of mind he broods on the futility of human existence. He compares human beings to ants on a burning log of wood. He recalls an incident: "Once in a camp I put a log on top of the fire and it was full of ants. As it commenced to burn, the ants swarmed out and went first towards the centre where the fire was, then turned back and ran towards the end. When there were enough on the end they fell off into the fire. Some got out, their bodies burnt and flattened, and went off not knowing where they were going. But most of them went toward the fire and then back toward the end and swarmed on the cool end and finally fell off into the fire. I remember thinking at the time that it was the end of the world and a splendid chance to be a messiah and lift the log off the fire and throw it out where the ants could get off into the ground. But 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." 13

Henry had finally arrived at the truth that there can be no separate peace for man. His much sought-for peace, could only be found in death.

13. Ibid. p 252
Frederick Henry is one of the early heroes of Hemingway who are lost in this big, buzzing and bewildering chaos of this world. They appear to have lost their moorings and are in search of values that would impart some importance and significance to their lives. Henry is afraid of sleeping in the dark and always slept with a light in the room. He is haunted by 'Nada' (Nothingness) and he utilises love as a means of confronting this 'Nada'. Whatever strikes the senses as good is taken to be good by him. In his view, the bloody and brutal operations of war have wholly annihilated whatever was customarily regarded as manifestation of culture and value in pre-war days. The high-sounding slogans infused with heroic sentiments which politicians invented and scattered about were devoid of reality. He avers that "I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice 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 bill posters 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 places had dignity. Certain numbers were the same way and certain dates and these with the names of the places were all you could say and have them mean anything. Abstract words such as glory, honour, courage were hollow and were obscene beside the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates."

Such then was Henry's disillusionment which mirrored the experience of the entire American nation. His experiences symbolise the utter ruin of pre-war values and culture. He also represented the new generation called "the lost generation" by Gertrude Stein, that was in search of new values to substitute the old ones. His experiences as delineated here in the novel in question, is proof positive of his desperate efforts to seek out new values. He finds significance only in personal relationships which are again fraught with the danger of dissolution. He finds no sense or significance in abstract words, abstract ideals and even religious theory and ideology. He achieves some perfection in love, but it is only a limited perfection or integration for they killed

14 Ibid. pp 143,144.
everybody alike. " 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." 15

Separated from the narrator, Henry is a passive character even though he is the hero in the novel under discussion. He is more of a symbol of the mood that prevailed during and after the war than a vigorous personality by himself. He is the embodiment of the author's own disgustfully bitter experience of the war and his confrontation with death or 'Nada' (Hemingway actually saw active service and was wounded during the Austro-Italian war. He was also involved in and survived two plane crashes within the space of two days). It is the narrator who indulges in philosophic disquisition because he has realised the significance of those chaotic and terrible experiences in which the hero found himself involved. In this destiny ridden universe where human endeavour is of little avail, Henry is a living example of what man can achieve --- fortitude, stoic endurance of pain and suffering and act with "grace under pressure".

15. Ibid. p 193
The novel propounds that death is the grim reality after all and in the presence of this reality a person of Henry's sensibility can only behave with dignity and decency by enduring what is beyond cure. Henry learns this lesson at last. Thus he moves from a condition of indifference and unreality to that of one who is let into the mystery and is made aware of the nature of suffering and the manner in which it must be met and endured.

A striking factor in the novel which immediately attract the attention of the reader is the use of rain as a symbol and harbinger of evil tidings. Catherine especially is terribly afraid of the rain for she admits "I've always been afraid of the rain." When Henry questions her as to why she is afraid of the rain she at first hesitates but a moment later tells him "All right. I'm afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it."
"No."
"And sometimes I see you dead in it."
Henry reasons with her that it is all nonsense and she agrees "It's all nonsense. It's only nonsense. I'm not afraid of the rain. Oh, oh, God, I wish I wasn't."  

16. Ibid. p 99
17. Ibid. p 100
All the unpleasant events in the book are accompanied by the rain. It was raining when Henry had to take leave of Catherine for the first time after his recuperation period was over. Then again throughout the retreat the rain came down and Aymo died in the rain. Two more shots came from the thick bush and Aymo, as he was crossing the tracks, lurched, tripped and fell face down. --- The three of us squatted over him in the rain.\textsuperscript{18}

The lovers' escape to Switzerland is made in a rain-swept and stormy night. At the foot of the stairs by the door the porter sat behind his desk. He looked surprised at seeing us, 'You're not going out, sir?' he said. 'Yes' I said. 'We're going to see the storm along the lake.' Have'nt you got an umbrella, sir?' 'No' I said. 'This coat sheds water.' He looked at it doubtfully, 'I'll get you an umbrella, sir,' he said. He went away and came back with a big umbrella --- He held the door open and we went out into the rain.\textsuperscript{19} Catherine's struggle for life and her consequent death in a hospital in Lausanne also occurs during a rainy spell. The only time the rain looked cheerful was when Henry and Catherine first set foot in Switzerland and freedom. There was a fine November rain falling but it looked cheerful and clean even with the rain.\textsuperscript{20} This is the only instance in the whole book where

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  \item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid. p 166
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid. p 206
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid. p 214
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the rain looked cheering. Little do the lovers realise that even this apparently cheering rain brings evil with it. For just when the lovers feel free and look forward to a life of bliss, Catherine is snatched away by the cruel hands of destiny.

The mountains and the plains are also used as symbols in the book. The mountains represent peace, tranquility and purity, whereas the plains stand for war, disease and death. All references to the battles waged take place in the plains. The retreat in all its pain and ugliness is also shown in the plains. Catherine too who had been resting up in the mountains meets her end when she comes down to the hospital in the plains of Lausanne for her delivery.

*A Farewell To Arms* in all its tragic proportions can be compared with the romantic tragedies of Shakespeare. The novel itself makes a passing mention of *Othello* at least once. But whereas the crux of the tragedy in *Othello* is jealousy, there is no jealousy of any kind in *A Farewell To Arms*. The novel has more in common with *Romeo And Juliet*, another Shakespearean tragedy. Hemingway

21. Ibid. p 198
himself described *A Farewell To Arms* as his *Romeo And Juliet*. The description is appropriate.

*A Farewell To Arms* is made up of five separate books each embodying a series of scenes and each scene like the scenes in a play being split up into sections which might correspond to stage directions and dialogues. However, the striking aspect of the resemblance lies in the fact that the novel is a love story like *Romeo And Juliet* which terminates in a tragedy due to causes beyond human control. Fatalists may characterise it as the inexorable working of fate. As in the feud of the two families responsible for the tragedy in *Romeo And Juliet*, the incidents of war taking place at that time are partly responsible for Catherine's death though the fact is that fate was all along plotting against the lovers loving and living happily together. Objectively considered however, the war is seen as a pestilence prevailing widely and seizing everyone in its grip. Man is caught in its trap and once he is caught up, the novel suggests, there is no means of escape just as in the case of Romeo and Juliet who pay with their lives for the stupid animosity between their two families.

But unlike *Romeo And Juliet* where both the prime
characters perish, in _A Farewell To Arms_ only the heroine, Catherine, dies; and the hero, Henry, is left to brood over his loss and bear it manfully and gracefully. It dawns upon him that in the scheme of things love is only a fleeting experience and death is the ultimate reality which overcomes one and all and over which one has no control, "That was what you did. You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn." The human state of affairs is such that man is alone in the universe. He has to suffer and die, sooner or later. In view of this position it is expected that he, that is man, bows down to his lot with courage and dignity.

Carlos Baker in his book _The Writer As Artist_ has this to say, - "The position occupied by _A Farewell To Arms_ among Hemingway's tragic writings may be suggested by the fact that he once referred to the story of Lieutenant Frederick Henry and Catherine Barkley as his _Romeo And Juliet_. The most obvious parallel is that Henry and Catherine, like their Elizabethan prototypes might be seen as star-crossed lovers. Hemingway might also have been thinking of how rapidly Romeo and Juliet, whose affair has begun as a mere flirtation, pass over into the status of relatively mature lovers. In the third place he may have"

22. Ibid. p 252
meant to imply that his own lovers caught in the tragic pattern of the war on the Austro-Italian front, are not far different from the young victims of the Montague-Capulet family feud.*

The catastrophe in either book is not brought about by a direct and logical result of the immoral social situation. Catherine's bodily structure, an unfortunate biological accident, is partly to blame for her death. Romeo and Juliet also meet their end due to an unfortunate accident, - the detention of the message-bearing friar. Both incidents however, show an artistic inevitability. Neither the war nor the feud are the only factors responsible for the tragedy. They only play a part in the inevitable scheme of things.

The phrase "star-crossed lovers" does not mean that they are the victims of an actual malevolent metaphysical power. Human beings are partly to blame for all the crisis that are set in motion. When Catherine lies dying in hospital, Henry quite naturally has fatalistic thoughts running through his mind, but he never even once blames anything called fate for her death. The labour pains remind him that her pregnancy has been comfortable and apparently normal; the present struggle for life is perhaps a way

* The_Writer_As_Artist - Carlos Baker
of evening things up, - " And this was the price you paid for sleeping together. This was the end of the trap. This was what people got for loving each other. --- So now they got her in the end. You never got away with anything." But he immediately rejects these thoughts, for her death is not because of their having sinful pleasures, " It would have been the same if we had been married fifty times." What is implied is that pain is natural and inevitable without either moral or metaphysical significance. The anonymous " they " represents evil and the way things are in the world.

Henry begins to philosophise on the human predicament. He compares the human situation to ants on a burning piece of log. It is plainly a gratuitous death which comes to the ants on the burning log. Some die immediately as Catherine is now dying. Others, like himself, who has survived a mortar explosion, will manage to get away, their bodies scarred, their future course uncertain, except that, ultimately death would get them. " Stay around and they would kill you."**

The pain and suffering borne by Catherine and her consequent death prove nothing except that she should not have become pregnant. " But she had to become

23. A Farewell To Arms - Ernest Hemingway; pp 245,246
24. Ibid. p 246
**. Ibid. p 152
pregnant in order to find out that becoming pregnant was unwise. Death is the penalty for ignoring the rules; it is also a fact which has nothing to do with rule or reason. Death is the fire which, in conclusion, burns us all, and it may singe us along the way. Frederick Henry's ruminations simply go to show that if he and Catherine seem star-crossed, it is only because Catherine is biologically double-crossed, Europe is war-crossed, and life is death-crossed.*

The theme of Europe being war-crossed, and life being death-crossed, is followed up in Hemingway's consequent novels. Death In The Afternoon portrays the death of Maera, the bull-fighter, and the manly way in which he makes his exit. To Have And Have Not pits one man, Harry Morgan, against a whole society. The novel is a commentary on man's loneliness and helplessness as Harry Morgan realises that "one man alone ain't got --- no chance." This was followed by The Fifth Column which has social discontent as its theme and is set against the backdrop of Civil war, which clearly anticipates the next novel, For Whom The Bell Tolls, a novel which has so much in common with A Farewell To Arms, that a comparison between the two novels is merited.

* The Writer As Artist - Carlos Baker; Penguin Books, 1969
Both *A Farewell To Arms* and *For Whom The Bell Tolls* are set against the background of war. Whereas *A Farewell To Arms* is set against the backdrop of the Austro-Italian war, *For Whom The Bell Tolls* has the Spanish war as the background. Both these novels, basically, are stories of love wherein at least one prime character dies and the other is left to grieve over the loss. The difference lies in the respective attitude of the heroes towards the war. Frederick Henry is disgusted and disillusioned with the war and prefers to make a 'separate peace'. But unlike him, for Robert Jordan there is no conflict between love and duty, for both he and Maria are completely devoted to the cause they pursue.

Catherine and Maria, the respective heroines in the novels, both have a painful past. Catherine is shown as just recovering from the blow of losing her fiancee "they blew him all to bits", in the front. She is even considered to be a little crazy, "I thought she was probably a little crazy. It was all right if she was. I did not care what I was getting into. This was better than going every evening to the house for officers". Frederick Henry takes advantage of her situation and makes use of her for his personal gratification. Only later and more gradually does he realise his true feelings and falls in

25. *A Farewell To Arms* - Ernest Hemingway; Penguin Books
p 20

26. Ibid. p 27
love with her, "I was not made to think. I was made to eat. My God, yes. Eat and drink and sleep with Catherine." 

Robert Jordan, on the other hand, falls in love with Maria at first sight. Maria, who had been tortured and raped by fascist soldiers, is a mentally disturbed woman. But Jordan, unlike Henry, does not ever think of taking advantage of her mental situation but does everything in his power to love and console her and remove the trauma from her mind.

The novels differ in at least one other aspect. Frederick Henry could never have been capable of Robert Jordan's sense of mystical union with Maria, even through separation and death.

It is to be noted that both the love stories take place away from the actual homes of the principal characters. Henry is an American and Catherine is a Britisher. Jordan, the hero of For Whom The Bell Tolls, is also an American. It is only Maria, Jordan's beloved, who is a local, a Spaniard.

Yet another of Hemingway's novels, The Old Man And The Sea, also merits attention for a comparative study with the novels already mentioned. A Farewell To Arms and

* Ibid. p 181
For Whom The Bell Tolls are stories of love; but The Old Man And The Sea is a story based on fishing. What is common in all these stories is that all of them end in tragedy. Each story presents struggle, conflict and resolution, thus keeping in line with the tragic theories of the early philosophers. Each story evokes our pity and fear and each ends on a positive note. The heroes of A Farewell To Arms and For Whom The Bell Tolls are young men in the prime of life, but the hero of The Old Man And The Sea is an old man who has gone for eighty-four days without a catch. He ventures far out to sea, and there he hooks his prized fish. But sharks attack his boat and after a valiant struggle to retain his fish, the old man is beaten by sheer odds. No doubt he loses the fish but by his courage and persistence he gains the moral victory. The overpowering odds do not cow him down; they only strengthened his resolve.

All these three novels place man in the midst of a hostile environment. All of them depict man's loneliness and struggle against his predicament. Though the struggle is one-sided and offers no permanent respite, yet, man is shown to struggle because he refrains from submitting meekly and always endeavours to try and overcome his limitations.
In conclusion and with reference to *A Farewell To Arms*, one may make an observation that, tragedy strikes not only the main characters but also the minor characters on the fringes of the story. It is ironical that Aymo should die as a result of a fatally fired shot by his own men. It is also ironical and tragic that Frederick Henry should shoot the engineer sergeant for desertion when, later on, he himself deserts the army. The fact that his own desertion is more a result of a compulsion does not in any way remove the element of tragedy.