CHAPTER VI

Hemingway's Conception of Love and Womanhood

Hemingway's is a world where perpetual war rages. Even in the domain of love it is war that sets the tone. Love and war are juxtaposed.

In the history of Western literature, saints had retired to give place to courteous knights, who, in turn, gracefully bowed themselves out in favour of common men, who, again, beat a hasty retreat before sex adventurers, play-boys and adulteresses. Religious love was replaced by courtly love which, in turn, was ousted by secular love. But there was still a romantic tinge about it. The prudery of Victorian morals, when the existence of a lady's ankles was a fact known only to her and her Creator, had given way in the twentieth century to a de-humbugging of sex. The writers in France, England and America accepted sex as a basic human drive and made it acceptable, if not respectable. Most of the American novelists have idealised sex and instincts. Eminent American novelists, like Dreiser, Faulkner, Steinbeck and Hemingway, have not been able to resist the malady.

The popularity of sex in almost every walk of life in America is too apparent to be reiterated. Sorokin has condemned outright the prevalence of sex in America. He states that the general trend in their pictures, photographs, sculpture, and other visual arts has been towards a more naked and sensuous representation of the human body. Sex permeates popular entertainment like the stage, the movies, the television and the
Sex appeal is a "must" in commercial advertising. Papers are stuffed with exotic stories. "They (the new gospels) teach us that continency, chastity, and faithfulness are irritational and reprehensible because they are painful and deprive us of pleasure. They teach us that all enjoyable sexual relations are morally good, no matter whether they are experienced with a prostitute or a gigolo, whether they are normal or abnormal, whether they are licit or illicit. Explicitly, they proclaim a new freedom whereby one has the right to enjoy intercourse at any time and with any mate". 1 All this is probably due to the shedding of inhibitions. Sex lost its immoral touch. The Freudian psychology of sex and the glandular biology of secretions gave it a respectable veneer. Sex aberrations and abnormalities were furtively tolerated, if not openly accepted. "The Kinsey reports claim that half the women and more than eighty per cent of the men in the country have had sexual relations before marriage, though often only with the partner they ultimately marry". 2 The same reports also made it clear that "by the mid-twentieth century neither chastity nor continence nor marital fidelity could be taken for granted". 3

1. *Sane Sex Order* by Pitirim A. Sorokin, p. 37.
2. *Why We Behave like Americans* by Bradford Smith, p. 62.
Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., detects a new theme emerging in some of the authors like Dreiser, Fitzgerald and Hemingway, but especially in Hemingway: "The theme of the male hero increasingly preoccupied with proving his virility to himself". This obsession of the American male with his manhood is due to his being "so unsure about his identity in general". He does not know who he is, where he is going and what he means to live and die for. "But if people do not know who they are, it is hardly surprising that they are no longer sure what sex they are".

In a couple of stories Hemingway makes fun of the Victorian ideals of purity. The Victorian middle-class deliberately and hypocritically ignored the prevalence of homosexuality in sexually segregated schools and the existence of prostitution. But they tried to extend the patriarchal ideal of celibacy. The youth were encouraged to practise premarital chastity. In "God Rest You Merry, Gentleman", Hemingway tells us of the mental torture an adolescent boy undergoes when he feels for the first time the urge of sex:

"I want to be castrated", the boy said.

"Why?" Doc Fischer asked.

"I've prayed and I've done everything and nothing helps".

"Helps what?"

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5. Ibid., p.442.

6. Ibid., p.444.
"That awful lust".

"What awful lust?"

"The way I get. The way, I can't stop getting. I pray all night about it." 7

The sex impulse is strong, new and frightening, but the boy feels that it is irreligious. When the doctor refuses to castrate him, he tries to do it on his own, and only succeeds in mutilating himself with a razor.

In another story, "Mr. and Mrs. Elliot", another of the Victorian ideals, "waiting for one's true love", is ridiculed: "Hubert Elliot was taking postgraduate work in law at Harvard when he was married... He was twenty-five years old and had never gone to bed with a woman until he married Mrs. Elliot. He wanted to keep himself pure so that he could bring to his wife the same purity of mind and body that he expected of her. He called it to himself living straight. He had been in love with various girls before he kissed Mrs. Elliot and always told them sooner or later that he had led a clean life. Nearly all the girls lost interest in him. ... Cornelia had said, "You dear sweet boy", and held him closer than ever when he had told her how he had kept himself clean for her. Cornelia was pure too. "Kiss me again like that", she said... Sometimes when they had been kissing together a long time,

7. The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway, p.492.
Cornelia would ask him to tell her again that he had kept himself really straight for her. The declaration always set her off again. 8

As contrasted with this, in Death in the Afternoon, Hemingway tells us about young men who, after their introduction to sex, sublimely believed that they had discovered intercourse, and, after their first experience of venereal disease, believed that they had discovered and invented that too. In "Up in Michigan", this introduction to sex is described, this time from the subjective point of view of the girl. Henceforth no heroine in Hemingway is a virgin when the novel opens, and sex is no novelty to the hero.

Two women influenced Hemingway profoundly during the most impressionable years of his life. One was his mother and the other was a little Ojibway Indian girl by the name of Prudie, with whom he always remained in love. She gave him his first experience of sex and the most satisfying. A quarter of a century later, he wrote in his story, "Fathers and Sons", "... she did first what no one has ever done better". 9 Being an Indian, she suffered from handicaps of economic and social inequality. She submitted to whatever the adolescent Hemingway did. All his heroines are

8. Ibid., pp. 259-260.
9. Ibid., p. 595.
a reflection of this little Indian - obedient and submissive. Catherine, Maria, and Renata are marked by passive submission.

The obedient and submissive type is unable to face the challenge of existence. Catherine loses her fiancé and becomes more or less unbalanced and, consequently, an easy prey to Lt. Henry who is on the prowl for adventure. Brett has suffered similarly. Her greatest need is not sex-satisfaction, though she wants that too. Rather, the series of lovers she has is her way of feeling a sense of security against loss. In a world dominated by men, it is natural that women feel that men have the monopoly of the advantages and the women of the handicaps. Many girls keep before them a masculine ideal. Brett cuts her hair short, wears a manly hat, competes with men in drinking, smokes like them, and sees bull-fights. In Hemingway, long hair is symbolic of womanly qualities. Brett has tried to de-sex herself, so to say, by cutting her hair short like a boy's. The advantages she has seen men enjoy in society, and the shocks she herself has undergone, have caused severe disturbances in the psychic development of Brett. Her two husbands left her behind to bear the burden of life alone. She wants, therefore, to appear like a man and does the things that usually men do, until she comes across a real man—Romero—who convinces her, not through argument, that she has not ceased to be a woman by choosing to dress like a man.
Catherine had been utterly submissive, but Brett appears to be in rebellion against the Fates. She challenges them and puts up defences by parading manly apparel but Rossi puts her back in her proper place. Mrs. Morgan of To Have and Have Not is the docile and home-loving type. Dorothy of The Fifth Column might be called Nostalgia, says Hemingway. Maria of The Bell and Renata of Across the River bear the unmistakable stamp of Prudie. They have no individuality of their own and their happiness lies in making their men-focks happy.

All women in Hemingway are basically the same. They belong to various nations, but they have the same instincts. They are almost identical in their desires and feelings. They all know no emotional constraints. They are not marked by a whole-hearted delight in life. They apparently cannot be, since they start life with all cards stacked against them. They are at loose ends with themselves and with the world. They are not Rosalinds, Violas or Beatrices whose love is gay, but whose gaiety conceals the tenderness behind it. Nor have they the unfettered free instincts of the animal which D.H. Lawrence would like women to have. They stretched out their timid hands to feel the world and the world stung them. Pure spontaneity has dried up. They are not intellectual abstractions like some of the creations of Bernard Shaw or Aldous Huxley. They are more or less dumb creatures whom the Fates have treated shabbily.
Some of them have been widowed before they have been married. Catherine loses her fiancé; Brett's two husbands were destroyed, one physically through death and the other mentally through shellshock; Dorothy gets dismissed by the man she loves; Mrs. Morgan loses her husband; Maria is left alone by the death of Jordan; and Renata has to live with the memory of Col. Cantwell. Their senses are still alive but blunted. They have been left with their appetites which cry for satisfaction. There is nothing of the abstract or the metaphysical in Hemingway's love. It is not the intellectual love of a Dante or a Shelley. It is warm and human to a certain extent, but it is instinct which has been intensified as a result of disappointment and disillusionment. The women appear only to be waiting for the sight of a pair of trousers for their hearts to go wildly racing. Theirs is a physical reaction to love. We are not convinced that it is anything more: "I'm a goner. I'm mad about somero boy. I'm in love with him I think!... Her hand was trembling."¹⁰

Or again:

"Then he felt her arms relax and she was shivering again as he held her."¹¹

Nor is it different with the men:

¹⁰. *Fiesta*, p. 139.

¹¹. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, p. 69.
"When he fell in love with Brett his tennis game went all to pieces".  

Or again:

"Every time Robert Jordan looked at her he could feel a thickness in his throat".

No word in the English language has been more commonly used and less accurately understood in all its implications than 'love'. It has been vaguely used to mean wish, desire, affection, friendship, devotion, egoism, passion, lust, sex and a host of other words - in short, to mean the whole gamut of pleasant feelings that may have even a faint relation with the heart. Here we have to restrict its connotations to feelings between two persons of opposite sexes. The male companionship, which Hemingway beautifully describes in some of his stories, properly finds no place here.

Whether it is lust or passion, love rarely rises above the biological level in Hemingway. There is no love without sex. In the solitary example where there is love without sex - Jake's for Brett - there is no choice since the man has been wounded in such a way that "he was capable of all normal feelings as a man but incapable of consummating

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12. *Fiesta*, p.35.

13. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, p.25.
them." There can be passion without love, e.g., in the story, 
Up in Michigan, where Liz is almost raped by Jim. There is
sex without passion, e.g., the relationship between Brett and
Mike who are engaged to each other as a matter of conve-
nience, for, he has loads of money. "The sexual level of
their relationship is indicated by the hotel - brothel where
they stay in Paris." There can be passion and sex, e.g.,
Lt. Henry's and Catherine's relationship. A Farewell to Arms
has been highly praised - and rightly so - and also highly
overpraised - which is unfair to the writer since it sets up
an artificial standard of judgement for his works. A Farewell
has been called Hemingway's Romeo and Juliet. It deserves
praise indeed. But it certainly is not a Romeo and Juliet,
for the very conception of love in those two works of art is
on two different levels altogether. The love-affair in
A Farewell begins as a light-hearted war-time flirtation to
while away the idle hours. Then the two seriously fall in
love, we are told. Against the background of violence, blood-
shed and impending danger this frankly sensual love-affair
takes on an idyllic hue and the emotion appears intensified.
But when the lovers remove themselves from the immediate
vicinity of war, they lose the advantage of being seen through

14. Interview given by Hemingway to George Plimpton,
15. 'Hemingway's Women' by Theodore Baradacke, published in
Farewell Hemingway: The Man and his Work edited by
K.H. McCaffery, p.309.
the haze of sympathy. Their love is seen to be nothing more than passion and they appear to be getting tired of each other. The novelty has worn off and Catherine intends to cut her hair short to make herself a new woman for It-Henry. It is a simple tale of passion which cools down, and, in a sense, a tragedy is prevented by her death. _Romeo and Juliet_ shows the triumph of love.

In _The Sun Also Rises_, a distinction is made between love and sex. Jake is the object of Brett's love, while Cohn and Mike are instruments of sex satisfaction. _Hamlet_ presents both but Brett would not like to marry him since that would ruin him. The man who loves her, cannot marry her; the man she loves, she will not marry; the man she marries, she does not love.

Hemingway appears to recognise that salvation for women does not lie in sensuous satisfaction alone. The defect lies, not in Hemingway's conception of love, but in his depiction of women. With him they are not individuals with their own existence - they are more like dream projections of an adolescent. The conflict between man and woman is missing. Love, which is a union of two souls, an understanding between two minds and an adaptation between two bodies, which together finally create a being superior to themselves, is not there. The purpose of marriage, according to Nietzsche, is: "A higher body shalt thou create, a first movement, a spontaneously rolling wheel - a creating one shalt thou create."
"Marriage: so call I the will of the twain to create
the one that is more than those who created it. The reverence for one another, as those exercising such a will, call
I marriage".16 This view appears to be slowly emerging in
Hemingway. Morgan and Mrs. Morgan have reached a stage where
understanding and companionship are slowly emerging from sex
and passion.

But a more fully satisfying relationship than any other
in the earlier books is to be found in The Bell. Maria has
been a victim of Fascist outrage. Her wounds are not merely
physical but psychological. She has been shorn of her hair.
She has been moving with Fabio's party of guerillas when
Jordan meets her. Their union has all the elements that make
it ideal - beauty, youth, a completely satisfying sex
relationship that reaches a mystic intensity, self-surrender
on the part of one, understanding on the part of the other,
and dreams of a future where sex does not play an important
role.

Childlessness was a curse from which the heroes and
heroines suffered. The marriages of Harry and Helen ("The
Snows of Kilimanjaro"), Macomber and Mrs. Macomber, Col.-Cant-
well and his wife, might not have been wrecks if there
had been children. It is only in a good marriage that the

16. Thus Spake Zarathustra by Nietzsche, p.73.
egos of the two partners merge. Children could save unions which are not perfect. The creative impulse of the individuals would find its way out in bringing up and educating their children. The lack of children sets up tensions which may wreck marriages. Children are a necessity not only for the perpetuation of the race but for the well-being of society itself. Childlessness is considered in India to be the consequence of heinous sins committed in a previous life. However irrational the belief may be, it directs attention to the importance of having children. In the Philippines, as among country-folk in England until quite recently, adolescent lovemaking serves also as a try-out of fertility. A girl can only marry if she conceives; and sterile girls become 'a sort of educational institution' for young boys'.

The union of Jordan and Maria appears to be one which will be productive. In other words there is between them 'a shared identity ... the mutual verification through an experience of finding oneself, as one loses oneself in another'. The lovers part but they ever will be with each other: "Thou wilt go now, rabbit. But I go with thee. As long as there is one of us there is both of us".

19. For Whom the Bell Tolls, p.436.
Love for Hemingway, both as a person and as a writer, is a serious emotion. Hemingway himself took his marriages and divorces seriously. Love for the sake of amusement is something of which he and his characters are ordinarily incapable.

Hemingway's is a tragic conception of love. Love is really something precious but it does not endure. Either love dies or one of the lovers dies. Jordan and Col. Cantwell have waited until death to discover a good woman whom they can really love. But they love and live in the shadow of death. But real love saves something even from death: "So if you have loved some woman and some country, you are very fortunate and, if you die afterwards it makes no difference." 20

The role of woman in Hemingway is rather an unflattering one. To the Hemingway hero woman is not a comrade but a convenience. Normal companionship as between two equals is not possible. She is the drawer of water and the hewer of wood. She is to keep her man comfortable. "Let me take thy shoes and dry them", Maria said. "I hang them here in the smoke of the fire". 21 Her happiness lies in making her master happy. The relationship of Jordan and Maria is less of comradeship and

21. For Whom the Bell Tolls, p. 195.
more of lovingly serving Maria's lord and master. Filar asks Maria, "Must you care for him as a sucking child?" Maria replies: "No. As a man who is cold and wet. And a man who has just come to his house".22

This view of Hemingway may appear reactionary, but it is all the more significant against the background of the changing roles of man and woman in American society. The woman in America today enjoys a position of equality in all professions. She has civil, economic and political rights. In the home the roles of male and female are to a great extent merged. Man does many of the duties which before were considered to be the domain of the female—washing dishes or cooking meals or feeding children. The women, meanwhile, have become doctors, lawyers, professors and engineers. Family life is breaking up. "In America in 1870 there was one divorce for every 33.7 marriages contracted; in the last few years, one per 2.5 to 3. In 1890, there were three divorces per 1,000 married females; in 1946, 17.8 per 1,000. In 1887, there were 0.3 divorces per 1,000 of the population; in 1947, 3.4. The supposedly sacred bond of marriage is now being broken several times more frequently than in preceding decades. And, with minor fluctuations, divorce has been and is steadily increasing".23

22 Ibid, p.197*
23 Sane Sex Order by P.A. Sorokin, p.7.
The Christina Jorgenson phenomenon of the changing sex is a fascinating subject for papers and magazines. Perhaps, man could feel himself more of a man if woman could be kept in her traditionally accepted place, namely, the home. In Hemingway, when the female is the dominating partner the result is usually a tragedy. There are two stories where the woman dominates. In one, she dominates through her wealth; in the other, by her beauty. It is not important who was at the back of Hemingway's mind when he drew the picture of Helen, the "rich bitch" as he calls her, in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro". The story deals with an artist who dies of gangrene with his life's work incomplete. He blames his rich wife whose wealth has been responsible for his talents going to seed. Mrs.acomber dominates her husband through her beauty. Both the stories end with the death of the man.

The sense of violence and war is present in Hemingway's conception of woman too. Passion is another name for extreme egoism and personal satisfaction. Where egoism is a ruling principle, violence is bound to be there. In Hemingway it is a question of one partner dominating the other. Dominate or be dominated over. No compromise. The violence of passion may temporarily blind the participants to the actual situation. "The lovers in the stories ... treat each other as obstacles to be overcome rather than personalities who must mutually give and take." 24 If the man does not dominate, the woman

will. Mrs. Macomber's seat of dominance totters when Macomber recovers his physical courage. She shoots her way back into a position of command, but it is a hollow victory, since she has no husband to dominate over.

The Hemingway hero is one; so is his heroine. Catherine, in *A Farewell to Arms*, represents the first stage. She has lost her fiancé. She meets Lt. Henry and they get more and more entangled in the coils of an unintentional passion for each other. She at last dies in childbirth. Brett of *The Sun Also Rises* is what Catherine would have been if she had not died but continued to live beyond the pages of *A Farewell*. She is older, has suffered further shocks, has lost her balance, has become a psychic wreck and a wretched nymphomaniac whom only an earthy strong man like Homer can save. She knows her own weakness: "Could'nt we live together, Brett? Could'nt we just live together?"

'I don't think so. I'd just tromper you with everybody. You couldn't stand it.'

'I stand it now.'

'That would be different. It's my fault, Jake. It's the way I'm made.' She is saved, and she goes to church although she is unable to pray. She is on the way to recovery when the novel closes.

25. *Fiesta*, p.43.
Brett has recovered and become Mrs. Morgan. Mrs. Morgan has a number of similarities with Brett and these similarities cannot be mere coincidences. She has bobbed her hair and dyed it blonde. She wears a mannish hat as Brett used to, and is as old as Brett would have been. Earlier she has led a promiscuous life and Morgan is aware of it. She has daughters only and he wonders whether the sons went out of her before he married her. (Catherine of A Farewell has lost a son.)

But time now starts moving in the reverse gear for the Hemingway heroine. She does not get older — she starts getting younger. Dorothy in The Fifth Column is definitely younger than Mrs. Morgan. Mrs. Morgan, more than the earlier heroines, had been the symbol of home. So is Dorothy of The Fifth Column: "... You could have a comfortable chair and a bookcase, and a good reading light, and pictures. I could fix it really nicely". 26 Like her predecessors and successors, she has a beautiful body and gives satisfaction.

Maria is younger and more beautiful still. She symbolises home even more, and what it stands for. Renata is even younger than Maria. She is barely nineteen, that is, almost half as old (or young) as Brett, who was thirty-four.

In Hemingway woman is the symbol of home. That she never finds herself a home is her tragedy. She always finds herself in an unsympathetic alien world of physical destruction and emotional stress. Catherine, Dorothy, Maria and Renata— all long for a home which they cannot have. They have "not time, not happiness, not fun, not children, not a house".27

In Hemingway, as well as in Kipling, woman is a clog in the way of doing one's duty. Kipling is very clear about it. Capt. Gadsby tells his friend Capt. Naflin: "Jack, be very sure of yourself before you marry. I'm an ungrateful ruffian to say this, but marriage— even as good a marriage as mine has been— hampers a man's work, it cripples his sword-arm, and oh, it plays hell with his notions of duty! ..." 28 In The Fifth Column, Philip spurns away Dorothy, for, he is afraid she may tempt him away from duty. In Kipling woman is always an impediment. In Hemingway, too. In addition, she is the test of a man's integrity in the satisfactory discharge of his duties.

27. For Whom the Bell Tolls, p.163.

Hemingway's conception of woman is lop-sided. The women are either soul-destroying vampires, as in 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro' or 'Hacomer', or tender, impressionable, amoeba-like creatures whose highest duty and good lies in surrendering their self for the benefit of their men. That companionship of give-and-take, that camaraderie where ideas could be exchanged, is something which Hemingway does not consider women to be capable of, or if they are capable of, does not advise men to treat them as if they are. John Atkins once asked Hemingway: "Is Love possible?" Hemingway answered, "Every man knows that for himself. For me it is."

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29. The Art of E-Hemingway by John Atkins, p.211.