Hemingway’s Fiction : A Feminist Interpretation

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ABSTRACT

Ernest Hemingway is regarded as one of the most representative and prominent writers of 20\textsuperscript{th} century. His works are considered classics of American literature. His economical and understated style made a strong impact on the 20\textsuperscript{th} century fiction. Criticism on Hemingway appears in volumes which predominantly focuses on his narrative style, the Hemingway hero, symbolism and his terse and pertinent writing. Along with all the technical aspects of his writing, themes play a very significant role in his fiction. Through his themes, Hemingway has tried to show the actual scenario of his time, with war being a presiding background of most of his works, he has successfully shown the society, its people and the changes that the war brought with itself.

When Hemingway started writing fiction, he already had behind him the shattering experiences of First World War. The whole western world was being split into two parts, the old and the new, and Hemingway is considered as the true voice of this emerging new liberated generation. In his fiction, he depicted the war and its shattering effects, social changes and the new generation emerging out of the war. Even though Hemingway is known for his masculine writing, his fictional portraits of woman, reveal an emancipated outlook on woman. In order to trace the equally significant woman characters of his fiction, it is important to view his novels The Sun Also Rises, A Farewell to Arms and For Whom the Bell Tolls with an unbiased and new outlook towards his female characters.

The Sun Also Rises epitomized the post war expatriate generation. It deals with the changing attitude of woman. The American women experienced a marked change in their lives, and Hemingway has created the character of Brett Ashley to showcase these changes. Brett is a woman of independent thinking, liberated and empowered, ready to
accept the new changes brought in society. Brett represents the new woman of her era and Hemingway has created her with empathy and understanding of a woman’s psychology.

A Farewell to Arms is a beautiful love story of lieutenant Frederic Henry and nurse Catherine Barkley against the backdrop of war. Catherine comes across as a very strong character who despite of a dreadful past emerges as a very strong and stable person. Hemingway, creates a vibrant character who has a strong sense of personal honour, moral sense and a distinct and independent thinking, along with the qualities of being a devoted lover and a caring, homely, domestic woman. Hemingway presents a beautiful amalgamation of old traditional values as well as the new liberated thinking. Catherine is the true hero of the book, who maintains calmness and composure till the end of the novel. Even in her death she is a picture of heroic courage.

For Whom the Bell Tolls is Hemingway’s tribute to Spain and his love for Spanish people. Through the characters of Pilar and Maria, Hemingway has depicted the new woman of Spain who started participating equally in the war and attaining a position of power in the war-torn Spain. Maria is depicted as a true companion, a strong woman who overcomes a dreadful past and emerges sane and composed to start afresh in her life. Pilar is a strong woman and undoubtedly the most colourful character of For Whom the Bell Tolls. She is a very strong character who as a leader, leads her band of guerrillas in the hour of need and as well as nurtures and cares for people around her as a mother.

Hemingway as a true feminist creates his woman characters with love and equal space as his male protagonists. Even though Hemingway nowhere commits himself on the question of emancipation of women, the very fact that he does not assign them to a separate limited sphere but rather makes them participants in the same question with which men are engaged regarding the meaning of life, such as sexual liberty and war, speaks volumes for his support to the woman’s cause.

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