A Farewell to Arms was first published in 1929. The novel is said to have established Hemingway as a major literary figure. The novel like many other works of Hemingway is the celebration of nada—nothingness. It depicts the human predicament, for example, the essential despair, disillusionment and emotional isolation of man. Ray B. West Jr. states that “The setting for A Farewell to Arms is the war itself, and the romance of Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley, their attempt to escape the war and its resulting chaos, is a parable of twentieth-century man’s disgust and disillusionment at the failure of civilization to achieve the ideals it had been promising throughout the nineteenth century” (622).

A Farewell to Arms, essentially, a tragic love-story about an American ambulance lieutenant and an English nurse, is often said to be based on Hemingway’s own experiences on Italian front. It remains a powerful statement about the effect of the horrors of war on ordinary people. In the novel, Hemingway uses his characteristic unadorned prose, clipped dialogue and understatement to convey an essentially cynical view of the world. A Farewell to Arms is a very well written book and John Dos Passos, writes in his essay New Masses that, “By well written, I don’t mean the tasty college composition course sort of thing that our critics seem to consider good writing. I mean writing that is terse and economical, in which each sentence and each phrase bears the maximum load of meaning, sense impressions, emotions. The book is a first rate piece of craftsmanship by a man who knows his job” (web).

A Farewell to Arms, for certain, portrays, not just the experience of war of the American protagonist, but the entire situation of the war on the Italian-Austrian front. Hemingway shows the wide canvas of the novel to depict the entire complex of the war situation in Italy in which the hero’s story is only an efficient instrument of structure and perspective. The novel shows how the war has disrupted the peace and
home-life of innocent, common people in Italy. Hemingway’s treatment of war theme in the novel is truly realistic. He uses, as narrator, a central character whose perspective on life is starkly rational. Frederic Henry not only experiences that conflict without any external aids of religion or tradition but also characters face those experiences without any kind of falsification.

Critics have praised Hemingway’s narrative structure, finding it rich in language, symbolism and irony. Malcolm Cowley and Clifton Fadiman, both felt that Hemingway had written his best book surpassing himself. Cowley found the style, “Subtler and richer prose, appropriate to a changed attitude in which emotions are more colored by thought.” (Herald Tribune, 1929) (web) and Fadiman called it, “a remarkably beautiful book, a very apotheosis of a kind of modernism.” (The Nation, 1929). (web)

Carlos Baker traces the importance of symbols in A Farewell to Arms and says that in “A Farewell to Arms, natural elements take on symbolic function” (95). Baker focuses on symbolism in the novel and maintains that in A Farewell to Arms “the plain and the mountains, have a fundamental value as symbols” (94) and throughout the substructure of the book, these two symbols play a very significant role. He observes:

Despite the insistent denotative matter-of-factness at the surface of the presentation, the subsurface activity of A Farewell to Arms is organized connotatively around two poles. By a process of accrual and coagulation, the images tend to build round the opposed concepts of Home and Not-Home. Neither, of course, is truly conceptualistic, each is a kind of poetic intuition, charged with emotional values and woven like a cable, of many strands. The Home-concept, for example, is associated with the mountains, with dry-cold weather, with peace and quiet, with love, dignity, health, happiness and the good life, and with worship or at least the consciousness of God. The Not-Home concept is associated with low-lying plains : with rain and fog,
with obscenity, indignity, disease, suffering, nervousness, war and death and with irreligion (101).

Baker believed that the essential meaning of the novel is conveyed through these two major symbols, that of the mountain and the plains which stands for the concept of home and not-home respectively.

E.M. Halliday in his essay Hemingway’s Ambiguity : Symbolism and Irony tries to take a balanced view of Hemingway’s narrative art. Halliday observes, “It would be foolish to argue that the work of any first-rate writer owes its success exclusively or even predominantly to any one narrative artifice. Hemingway has used techniques of symbolism and techniques of irony and used them well: what we want in criticism is an even view of his use of these and other artistic resources that does not exaggerate one at the expense of other” (21). This statement makes it clear that Halliday focused on the use of irony in the novel and gives it greater importance than the symbolism.

One of the distinctive qualities of Hemingway’s prose style in A Farewell to Arms, is the simplicity of words. As Ford Madox Ford once remarked, words in Hemingway fiction “strike you as if they were pebbles fetched fresh from a brook. They live and shine each in its place” (156). The use of simple words became typical of the writer. Pierre Drieu La Rochelle asserted in his French preface to ‘L’Adieu aux arms’ (A Farewell to Arms), “One can only admire the richness of the dialogue; above all there is Hemingway spirit. This spirit is not of humor or irony but of health; what moves you about it is the very tone of his life, his health, his high spirits” (149). Schneider describes the novel as “a lyrical novel in which a single emotion informs every scene of the novel, lying beneath every descriptive passage and every bit of characterization” (284).

Another very significant quality of Hemingway prose is, its quality of the ‘iceberg.’ His theory of iceberg throws considerable light on his techniques of understatement and symbolism. Hemingway says in Death in the Afternoon : “The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water”
His iceberg theory of omission is the foundation on which he builds his stories. The syntax, which lacks subordinating conjunctions, creates static sentences and many types of internal punctuation are omitted in favor of short declarative sentences.

Writ Williams has tried to put the novel in the category of Aristotelian tragedies by describing the novel as “a great study of doom” (88). Though very few critics traced humor in Hemingway’s works, but S.P.S. Dahiya in his book, The Comic Sense of Hemingway traces the humorous trail throughout the A Farewell to Arms. Dahiya says, “Hemingway uses humor as an effective means to bring out the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to love. The nature and range of humor, is, in turn, greatly determined by the variety of the love situations. If there is ironic humor resulting from the priest’s spiritualism, there is also cynical humor in Rinaldi’s sceptical eroticism. If there is sarcastic humor in Fergus’ pedantic attitude to love, there is also wit and gaiety in the wholesome love affair between Frederic and Catherine” (108).

Loss of love, death and war, certainly form the central themes of almost all the Hemingway’s work. Frederic Svoboda points out, “in A Farewell to Arms, the First World War is most directly treated, and the loss of love through Catherine Barkley’s death in child birth is not merely paralleled by the war. In the novel the many losses of the war become nearly equal in dramatic force to the loss of love” (159).

Even though the critics have discussed the narrative patterns, writing styles of Hemingway in A Farewell to Arms, in abundance, yet the hero still remains very much in the centre. W.M. Frohock remarks that A Farewell to Arms is utterly undramatic. According to Frohock, strictly speaking, “this book is hardly a novel at all, at least if the word is used in the traditional sense of a story which develops through interactions of a group of characters one upon the other. For Hemingway’s story has really, but, one major character, Frederic Henry” (178).

One of the reasons responsible for these misleading judgements about the novel is the tendency of the critics to identify Frederic Henry, the protagonist, as a thinly disguised version of Hemingway himself. Carlos Baker believes that A
Farewell to Arms is “a romanticized fictional version of some of the things that had happened to him personally ten years before” (196).

Philip Young also sees Frederic Henry as the direct projection of the writer himself. According to him, Hemingway and his hero are victims of traumatic war experiences. As a result of it, he regards Frederic Henry as psychologically wounded and fails to recognize the hero’s commitment to a cause, sense of duty and great importance he attaches to personal human relationship, along with all the humanly flaws, that a normal person generally possesses. Young states about Frederic Henry, “This man will die a thousand times before his death, and although he would learn how to live with some of his troubles and how to overcome other, he would never completely recover from his wounds as long as Hemingway lived and recorded his adventures” (198). According to Susan F. Beegal, Young rearranged Hemingway’s works “in chronological sequence” so that “the events of Nick’s life would make up a meaningful narrative in which a memorable character grows from child to adolescent to soldier, veteran, writer and parent—a sequence closely paralleling the events of Hemingway’s own life” (NAS 6) (285).

Along with Baker and Young, Bhim S. Dahiya also traces the significance of the hero in the novel and believes that Frederic Henry is a distinctive character whose main aim is to serve humanity. Dahiya asserts that Henry by all means is the main hero of the book. He says:

He is ready to expose himself to life experience and has the capacity to absorb that experience; he has the modern consciousness, committed to the rational view of life, and is able to save himself from regression into the simple or primitive view of life informed by blind faith in religion and myth, ritual and convention as well as from falling into the morass of cynicism and nihilism of the “lost generation” informed by the inability to commit yourself to any abiding values of life and by the tendency to drift and degenerate towards self-destruction. Be it love or war, the hero always outshines others by taking an admirable position in the situation; by acting, that is, selflessly rather than
selfishly, bravely rather than cowardly, humanly rather than inhumanly, moderately rather than extremely (52).

Earl Rovit implies the tyro theory here and asserts, “The interior struggle is symbolized in *A Farewell to Arms*’ hero, Frederic Henry. The tyro, Henry, undergoes a series of unjust brutalities at the hands of mysterious forces beyond his understanding. He is blown up and seriously wounded, only to be nursed back to wholeness and security by Catherine” (99). Henry stands for the concrete immediacy of experience and is “embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious and sacrifice and the expression in vain” (*FTA* 133). He concludes that only place names have dignity and that abstract words “such as glory, honor, courage are hollow and obscene” (*FTA* 133).

Some critics also find a resemblance of *A Farewell to Arms* to the traditional tragic drama that moves along five well defined stages. Hemingway wrote of *A Farewell to Arms*, “The fact that the book was a tragic one did not make me unhappy since I believed that life was a tragedy and knew it could only have one end” (40).

Catherine Barkley’s death in the end of the novel signifies and encapsulates the whole gist of the novel *A Farewell to Arms*. The protagonist learns the harsh and tragic reality of life. As Baker puts it, “The loved woman has become in death an abstract unvital image of her living self, a marble memorial to all that has gone without hope of recovery. Her death completes the symbolic structure, the edifice of tragedy so carefully erected” (116). All that Baker discusses about is Catherine Barkley’s death and its importance in hero’s achievement of complete knowledge and understanding of life.

Critics have discussed about the narrative techniques, style, themes, hero and many similar topics, but all salient critics of Hemingway quite clearly tend to sideline or neglect the female characters of Hemingway’s works and their importance. Sandra Whipple Spanier asks; “Why has Catherine, the only character besides Frederic who inhabits this novel from beginning to end, been so consistently ignored” (13). Spanier remarks that Catherine “has been attacked or dismissed for her simplicity” (14).
There has been a great debate among the critics on the female protagonist Catherine Barkley. In fact she has been the butt of disapproval by critics. It will be proper to study within the entire perspective of the writer in order to have a better understanding of Catherine Barkley’s character and to show her in her true light, sans all the biased studies done so far. Catherine Barkley has long been regarded as the ultimate dream-girl. “a divine lollipop” in the words of Frances Hackett (32), “the abstraction of lyric emotion” according to Edmund Wilson (38), “idealized past the fondest belief of most people and even the more realistic wishes of some”, according to Philip Young (190), Millicent Bell calls her “a sort of inflated rubber doll, woman available at will of his man” (150). She has also been called “an old fashioned not a new woman” (Bardacke 345), “a leaf of lettuce” (Cooperman 185) and “a passionate priestess” (Waldhorn 123).

In fact, no other character in all of Hemingway’s fiction has provoked responses so numerous, so contradictory and so strong as has Catherine Barkley of *A Farewell to Arms*. But the charges against Catherine are not justified, because her strong personality, individuality, independent thinking and philosophical views emerge into bold decisions, highlights the solidity and sturdy concreteness of her personality. In succeeding decades however, too many critics in dealing with Catherine Barkley have all, but forgotten that she is functioning in the environment of a brutal and irrational war—a war that by extension becomes a metaphor for the conditions of life itself in that time. And yet Catherine emerges as the truly heroic figure of the novel.

In the characterization of Catherine Barkley, Hemingway has tried to present a woman, who is both modern and traditional. She possesses traditional values, maternal and domestic qualities. She is self-reliant, competent, qualified but without the outrageous attitude and manliness displayed by new-woman figures. Catherine Barkley represents a beautiful amalgamation of an orthodox, and independent young woman. She is devoted and self contented who chooses to love Frederic Henry and is loved by him in return. She is a perfect match for Henry because after his fleeing from the corrupt and untrustworthy world, she is the only person whose arms provide him a
comfort zone. Over the years critics have found respect and overt sympathy for women in Hemingway’s works. Joyce Wexler has made a strong argument for the strength of Catherine’s character. Wexler says, “as a woman Catherine is, neither demeaned nor idealized by Hemingway, but rather presented as a forerunner of the kind of person Frederic has become by the time he narrates the story” (112).

Catherine is a modern woman, who squarely faces the obstacles. She is self confident and competent enough to accept the society in which the war is taking place. Far from being a blind romantic, she is a shell-shocked victim of the war. Learning from her losses, Catherine is now determined, in the course of the novel, to forge a meaningful existence for herself in a world where the traditional structures – morality, religion, patriotism – have become hollow, empty and even obscene. Catherine is a kind of Athena, a beautiful girl. She denies formal religion as a source of comfort. As a modern woman, she has rejected all the traditional values, she has no religion, instead her and Henry’s devotion to each – other came to be known as the constant factor around which they organize their lives. In a world, where all the traditional notions of meaning and order have been shattered, Catherine searches for an orderly existence and an ideal life even if its only temporarily.

The first and foremost striking quality of Hemingway’s female characters that gets imprinted on readers’ mind and heart is the beautiful depiction of them. Hemingway heroines are epitomes of beauty. Catherine is a very attractive woman as both Rinaldi and Henry admits at the very first meeting.

Miss Barkley was quite tall she wore what seemed to me to be a nurse’s uniform, was blonde and had a tawny skin and grey eyes. I thought she was very beautiful (A Farewell to Arms, 18).

During the initial meetings, Catherine essentially impresses Henry by her striking beautiful looks. Henry recalls:

“Hello, darling,” she said. She looked fresh and young and very beautiful. I thought I had never seen any one so beautiful. (FTA 84)
Later also every now and then Henry is found being mesmerized by Catherine’s pure and serene beauty.

She had wonderfully beautiful hair and I would lie sometimes and watch her twisting it up in the light that came in the open door and it shone even in the night as water shines sometimes just before it is really daylight. She had a lovely face and body and lovely smooth skin too. We would be lying together and I would touch her cheeks and forehead and under her eyes and her chin and throat with the tips of my fingers and say, “Smooth as piano keys, ....” (FTA 103)

Catherine Barkley the female protagonist of *A Farewell to Arms*, is totally a sufferer in the war, when we meet her in the novel, she has already lost her boyfriend in the war and she is slightly shocked and stunned by her loss ;

“she was carrying a thin rattan stick like a toy riding crop, bound in leather.”
“IT belongs to a boy who was killed last year.”
“I’m awfully sorry.”
“He was a very nice boy. He was going to marry me and he was killed in Somme.” (FTA 18)

Catherine’s boyfriend dies in the war. She is very much shocked by it. These words show her emotional attachment to him :

We sat down on a bench and I looked at her.
“You have beautiful hair” I said.
“Do you like it?”
“Very much.”
“I was going to cut it off when he died” (FTA 18).

Hemingway has portrayed very well in *A Farewell to Arms* that, how a woman feels when she loses her partner and what importance a woman pays to her man. Catherine has great affinity with wounded soldiers. In wounded soldiers, she sees the
image of her dead fiancé. Catherine shows many traits associated with war stress on the homebound women, who each day scanned the military causality lists for the names of their husbands, sons and lovers. She began her nursing career at end of 1915, when her fiancé was enlisted. Catherine says:

Since the end of fifteen. I started when he did. I remember having a silly idea he might come to the hospital where I was. With a saber cut, I suppose, and a bondage around his head. Or shot through the shoulder. Something picturesque ….

…. He didn’t have a saber cut. They blew him all to bits.” (FTA 19)

Had she known what the war would be like, she would have married him before he left:

“Why did not you marry?”
“I don’t know … I was a fool not to. I could have given him that anyway. But I thought it would be bad for him.” (FTA 18)

Catherine realizes that she was unaware of the pending doom, before the death of her fiancé:

“…. he wanted to go to war and I didn’t know.”
I did not say anything.
“I did not know about anything then. I thought it would be worse for him. I thought perhaps he couldn’t stand it and then of course he was killed and that was the end of it.” (FTA 18)

After his death, she behaves like someone who has been psychologically wounded by the war that claimed her first love. She endures and gradually comes to realize the finality of death. As an ideal female figure, Catherine not only accepts her pain but also shares her insight and growth with Frederic. Catherine knows that the only certainty in life is the imminence of death. It indicates her maturity and
philosophical thinking, a kind of quality found in an inspiring and motivating figure. And this brief initial encounter with Catherine’s past, brings in focus, two very significant qualities of her character i.e. her devotion towards true love and her understanding of war and how she has come to terms with the harsh realities of war. As Thornton Wilder has rightly pointed out about Catherine “she is the true hero of the book” (86).

She also has an uncanny intuitive perception and can see through the games of people and read their minds. When Frederic Henry is introduced to Catherine, she sees through his game and insists on honesty:

“This is a rotten game we play, isn’t it?”
“What game?”
“Don’t be dull.”
“I’m not, on purpose.”
You’re a nice boy,” she said, “And you play it very well as you know. But is a rotten game.”
“Do you always know what people think?”
“Not always. But I do with you. You don’t have to pretend you love me.”

(FTA 29-30)

Catherine’s femininity is a powerful force in *A Farewell to Arms*, she has her ethical beliefs very clearly etched in her mind. When Henry first meets her she does appear to be erratic and perplexed but even then she possessed a strong and clear mind and she wouldn’t let Henry take advantage of her. She slaps him when he attempts of kiss her:

“… I took her hand. She let me take it and I held it and put my arm around under her arm.
“No”, she said. I kept my arm where it was.
“What not?”
“No.”
“Yes,” I said. “Please.” I leaned forward in the dark to kiss her and there was a sharp stinging flash. She had slapped my face hard. Her hand had hit my nose and eyes, and tears came in my eyes from the reflex. (FTA 24)

Though she immediately apologizes for her act, but she tells Henry, “I’m dreadfully sorry,” she said. “I just couldn’t stand the nurse’s–evening–off aspect of it. I didn’t mean to hurt you. I did hurt you, didn’t?” (FTA 24)

Such an act could not have been committed by a dream-girl or a wish-projection persona. Critics have often tried to hide Catherine’s act of courage and self-respect under the veils of her mental instability. She is an intelligent and experienced girl having adequate knowledge of human nature. Even though she would like to have a male companion, she can face life on her own. And then after apologizing, her behavior changes and she ends up crying on Henry’s shoulder.

“I’m so sorry …. I’m dreadfully sorry …. you are sweet”

“Yes. You are a dear. I would be glad to kiss you if you don’t mind.”

I kissed her hard …. And her head went back against my hand and then she was crying on my shoulder.

“Oh, darling … you will be good to me, won’t you?” (FTA 24-25)

When Catherine first meets Frederic, she is in partial remission. She is coming in terms with the reality. She has lost her love to the brutal war. And she can see through the minds of people but at the same time she is ready to commence a new start and fall into a relationship. On their third meeting, Catherine becomes a different woman altogether, instructing Henry in his role, telling him what to call her and how to say certain phrases :

“ …. you call me Catherine?”

“Catherine” We walked on a way.

“Say”, “I’ve come back to Catherine in the night.”

“I’ve come back to Catherine in the night.”
“Oh, darling, you have come back, haven’t you?”
“Yes.” (FTA 28-29).

She is quite obviously acting out a reunion with her dead fiancé. She further tells her confused, would be lover:

“I had a very fine little show and I’m all right now. You see I’m not mad and I’m not gone off. It’s only a little sometimes.” (FTA 30)

Catherine emerges as a very strong and stable character except for the few initial responses she gives to Frederic. She appears to be a very caring person. She is very much concerned about the security of her lover. Catherine gives Henry Saint Anthony, while she has not been a Roman Catholic but she still believes that Saint Anthony will protect Henry from danger:

She was unclasping something from her neck. She put it in my hand. “It’s Saint Anthony,” she said. “And come tomorrow night.”
“You’re not a Catholic, are you?”
“No, But they say a Saint Anthony’s very useful.”

......
“Be a good boy and be careful.” (FTA 40-41)

As Catherine has lost her first boyfriend in the war, so she is very much concerned about Frederic. She is afraid lest she might loose him. One of the major as well as significant point in Catherine’s characterization is that, Catherine is not made in the image of the highly individualistic, emancipated and self-willed western woman. She is an oriental woman with extraordinary loyalty to her man. Catherine falls in the category of devoted lovers. Catherine lives by a definite, unshakable value system and her values are love and courage. Despite everything, love is her religion until she dies. Being immersed in love, she wants to forget the war and its brutal realities. Catherine wants no other life than with Frederic and no other man than him.
Woman, in that age, had not enough opportunities to expose themselves. They had to depend on their male partners. But Catharine is independent and dependent both and this is what Hemingway has shown with the case of Catharine. However, she has had men in her life but she has to be alone in her life, she lives alone after the death of her first boyfriend and before meeting with Frederic. She has to die even before getting married. Linda Martin says, “A Farewell to Arms makes clear that Catherine needs friends, lovers and good luck. She doesn’t have much of the later” (32).

Except for a brief moment, when Catherine gives Frederic Saint Anthony before his wounding, Catherine does not see him again until she is transferred to the Milan hospital. When she walks into his room, Frederic’s legs are bandaged and he has a head wound unlike the one Catherine once imagined for her fiancé. As an ideal woman, her fantasy of caring for her wounded man is carried out in reality. With the advent of Book II, the Catherine –Frederic love relationship takes its full shape, the initial introduction and attraction culminates into a beautiful affair. Even before Henry finally meets Catherine in Milan, he is seen asking about her from other nurses. And then Henry finally meets Catherine:

I looked towards the door. It was Catherine Barkley. She came in the room and over to the bed.

…. “Hello”, I said. When I saw her I was in love with her. Everything turned over inside of me. She looked toward the door, saw there was no one, then she sat on the side of the bed and leaned over and kissed me. … I was crazy about her. I could not believe she was really there and held her tight to me.” (FTA 84)

Henry feels a sincere emotion towards Catherine. Hemingway hero is now aware of the feeling of love. Without Catherine, Henry feels lonely and looks for her company. Through Catherine’s love Henry learns that love can mean something more than casual hunger of the senses. Catherine takes love as God and her dedication towards love is phenomenal. The priest gives the true definition of love:
What you tell me about in the nights. That is not love. That is only passion and lust. When you love, you wish to do things for. You wish to sacrifice, you wish to serve. (*FTA* 66)

And after becoming aware of his love for Catherine, Henry admits his relationship with Catherine,

“God knows I had not wanted to fall in love with her. I had not wanted to fall in love with anyone. But God knows I had … all sorts of things went through my head but I felt wonderful … (*FTA* 85).

Catherine’s deep feelings of love are revealed, when she says:


Their sexual union makes them both more complete, revealing Catherine’s guilt for not giving herself to her dead fiancé, while comforting Frederic. As the summer passes, Frederic becomes her religion and he fills the vacuum in Catherine’s life:

We had many small ways of making love and we tried putting thoughts in the other one’s minds while we were in different rooms. It seemed to work sometimes but that was probably because we were thinking the same thing anyway …. We said, “We are married,” and Catherine said, “You’re my religion. You’re all I’ve got.” (*FTA* 104)

Hemingway has not shown his heroine Catherine as a married woman, although she gets opportunity for marriage. When Henry proposes her marriage she refuses saying that, in hospital it is not possible and if they do so, she will be sent out of the hospital. In Henry’s words:
We said to each other that we were married the first day she had come to the hospital and we counted months from our wedding day. I wanted to be really married but Catherine said that if we were, they would send her away … I suppose I enjoyed not being married, really. I know one night we talked about it and Catherine said, “But darling, they’d send me away.” (FTA 103)

Catherine emphasizes on the understanding between lover and beloved rather than the formality of marriage. She doesn’t believe in the ritual of marriage. She says to Henry:

“We’re really married. I could not be any more married.”

…. 

“There is not any me. I’m you. Don’t make up a separate me.”

…. 

“You see, darling, I had one experience of waiting to be married.”

…. 

“You see, darling it would mean everything to me if I had any religion. But I haven’t any religion” (FTA 103-104).

Catherine does not believe in the ritual of marriage as she thinks that even without the formal ceremonies, she is married to Henry. Frederick J. Hoffman asserts, “The general attitude towards marriage during the year 1915-30 was one of the free criticism; there was a search for alternative arrangement between the sexes within and without marital bond” (228). Even critics believed that marriage is just a false necessity of society, the couple rather, should concentrate upon mutual understanding between them. Claude Levi-Strauss adds:

The total relationship of exchange which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman, but between two groups of men and the women figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners … this remains true even when the girl’s feelings are taken into
consideration, as more over, is usually the case. In acquiescing to the proposed union, she precipitates or allows the exchange to take place, she cannot alter its nature (161).

A marriage devoid of good understanding between man and woman is called a “Social organization” (544) by Gayle Rubin. For her, if man and woman are having good understanding, then there is no need of any ritual. However, Catherine is not married with Frederic. But she considers herself to be his wife. She follows every norm, virtue and qualities of a wife:

“Don’t you want a drink.”
“No. It always makes you happy darling and it only makes me dizzy.”
“Didn’t you ever drink brandy?”
“No, darling I’m very old fashioned wife.” (FTA 127)

While Frederic is recovering from his surgery, Catherine becomes pregnant. Catherine hides her pregnancy for three months before telling Frederic because she doesn’t want to bother him:

“What is the matter, Catherine?”
“Nothing. Nothing’s the matter.”
“Tell me.”
“I don’t want to. I’m afraid. It’ll make you unhappy or worry you.”
“Tell it.”
“Do I have to?”
“Yes”
“I’m going to have a baby, darling. It is almost three months along. You are not worried, are you? Please, please don’t. You mustn’t worry?” (FTA 123-124).

She really knows her role as a lover. For her love means and entails mutual sharing of pains and pleasures:
“I did everything. I took everything but it did not make any difference.”
“I’m not worried … I only worry about you … you are pretty wonderful.”
“No, I’m not. But you mustn’t mind. I’ll try and not make trouble for you. I know I’ve made trouble now. But haven’t I been a good girl until now … it will be like that. You simply mustn’t worry” (FTA 124).

From this moment she pulls herself together and defines the perimeters of her own existence. Catherine exemplifies the Hemingway code. She lives for the moment and cares nothing for convention. By code standards, her stoicism is exemplary. She has an appreciation of life and she understands it well. Sandra Whipple Spanier notes in Catherine Barkley and The Hemingway Code: Ritual and Survival in A Farewell to Arms that “the code demands a lust for life and a cheerful disregard of doom” (136). And this is what Catherine exhibits and this is, who she is.

Joyce Wexler has made a full-fledged argument for Catherine’s strength of character which is “neither demeaned nor idealized by Hemingway” (132). Wexler breaks new grounds when she declares that Frederic and Catherine are “members of the same species, Hemingway Hero” (132).

Sandra goes further to support Wexler’s argument of considering Catherine a ‘code hero.’ Sandra suggests: “Catherine Barkley not only is a strong and fully realized character, she is the one character in this novel who exemplifies in the widest range the controls of honor and courage, the ‘grace under pressure’ (Young, 63) that have come to be known as the ‘Hemingway code’. Her part is to teach Frederic Henry by example how to survive in a hostile and chaotic world in which an individual can gain at most a limited autonomy – through scrupulous adherence to roles and rituals of one’s own devising. She is the ‘code hero’ of this novel if anyone is” (132).

Catherine’s faith is in the validity of her emotions. She believes in living freely without holding back anything. When Frederic says that he worries about having a baby and offers to marry, Catherine refuses to do so because she considers
that a married woman is a burden on her man and at the same time she will lose her independence because a married nurse would be sent home:

“I wanted us to be married really because I worried about having a child if I thought about it …. We talked about it and Catherine said, “but darling, they’d send me away”

“May be they wouldn’t.”

“They would. They’d send me home and then we would be apart until after the war” (FTA 103).

Catherine refuses because she doesn’t want to become a problem for Henry and put extra responsibilities on him. For Catherine, her love is her religion:

“Could not we be married privately some way? Then if, anything happened to me or if you had a child.”

“There is no way to be married except by church or state. We are married privately. You see, darling, it would mean everything to me if I had any religion. But I have not any religion.”

“You gave me the Saint Anthony.”

“That was for luck. Someone gave it to me.”

“When nothing worries you?”

“Only being sent away from you. You’re my religion. You’re all I’ve got” (FTA 104).

Hemingway’s ideal woman possesses a phenomenal quality of being caring. She is the archetypal female, the ultimate mother figure. Henry used to write to his family before falling in love with Catherine but as she becomes an increasingly mothering presence to him, he sheds what little commitment he has to his family and stops writing to them. And Henry happily surrenders to Catherine’s femininity. This caring nature has two sides as mother and as mistress. Catherine half mothers and half mistresses her counterpart Frederic. Catherine wants no other life than with Henry.
In the character of Catherine, Hemingway explores a woman’s attempt to find private peace in the patriarchal framework through selfless love but there is also a new woman’s affirmation of will. Catherine feels the happiest when she is with Henry. She is at ease in Milan in the midst of a war because she is a young woman in midst of love. She is a completing agent for the hero and is in return completed by her association with him. As a true companion she happily attends to her partner’s physical as well as emotional needs. Catherine as a woman is an example of total self-effacement and complete surrender. Her love for Henry reaches its zenith when they were together in Milan. For example, at one point she says:

“I’ll say just what you wish and I’ll do what you wish and then you will never want any other girls, will you … I’ll do what you want and say what you want and then I’ll be a great success, won’t I?”

“What would you like me do now?” (FTA 96).

The same sentiment is repeated:

“You see,” She said. “I do anything you want.”

“I’m afraid I’m not very good at it yet …. I want what you want. There isn’t any me anymore. Just what you want.”

“I’m good. Aren’t I good? You don’t want any other girls, do you?” (FTA 96).

She is happy and satisfied in surrendering herself as repeatedly evident in her words:

“Darling, don’t make a separate me. I’m you” (FTA 103).

“You’re my religion. You’re all I’ve got” (FTA 104).

Catherine has therefore completely effaced herself, her wants and her needs. She exists in and only for Henry. Overshadowing the selfless love and attitude of Catherine Barkley, a number of male critics see her as a destructive force, all the more deadly in her sweet disguise. Leo Gurko finds her, “so terrifyingly and clingingly in love” with Frederic that she becomes his “Leechlike shadow” (87). According to
Richard Hovey, “Such a disvaluing by Catherine of her own self, such a need to flee the normal burdens of selfhood, indicates that her love is feverish in its dependency” and he concludes that “however lyrical is the affair in this novel, the love impulses in it are fettered by sadism and death wishes” (76). But Scott Donaldson demolishes all these charges against Catherine and says:

Her willingness to submerge herself in her relationship with Frederic far from being a sign of female spinelessness is an act of will. Reeling from her losses, Catherine is now determined to forge a meaningful existence for herself in a world where the traditional structures—morality, religion, patriotism—have proven hollow and empty even ‘obscene’ (134).

Catherine should be considered a woman with agency, someone attempting to find meaning and achieve a sense of psychological equilibrium against the background of war. The moments of submissiveness and self-erasure are actually Catherine’s idea of surviving in a world, where conventional ideas once accepted as true have become, shaky grounds for creating a sense of self.

Naomi Grant claims that “Catherine is more mature. Catherine, like other Hemingway women, is a good teacher in the art of giving of self” (23). Catherine’s warmth and love provides complete security and a feeling of nurturing. Frederic feels at home in her company.

“Come over, please. I’m a good girl again.” I looked over at the bed. She was smiling.
I went over and sat on the bed beside her and kissed her.
“You’re my good girl.”
“I am certainly yours”, she said.
After we had eaten we felt fine and then after, we felt very happy and in a little time the room felt like our own home. My room at the hospital had been our own home and this room was our home too in the same way” (FTA 138).
But few moments before, in the same red plush hotel she did feel like a whore and she shared her thoughts with Frederic:

She did not look happy ....
“What’s the matter, darling?”
“I never felt like a whore before,” she said. I went over to the window and pulled the curtain aside and looked out. I had not thought it would be like this.
“You’re not a whore.”
“I know it, darling. But it isn’t nice to feel like one” (FTA 137).

Catherine is a witty and intelligent girl and we often find her stating brilliant remarks: her responses to Henry’s curiosity is so satisfying that reader takes her as one of the memorable characters. She says:

“The brave dies perhaps two thousand deaths if he’s intelligent. He simply doesn’t mention them” (FTA 126).

She talks about vices, she certainly has the knowledge of literature when she remembers a poem by Marvell (FTA 139) and she is even aware about the law.

….. you see darling, if I marry you I’ll be an American and anytime we’re married under American Law the child is legitimate (FTA 262).

Even though Ferguson is very upset on her advanced state of pregnancy, and they are not even married, but Catherine has no regret. She is more concerned about Henry’s safety and asks:

“Won’t they arrest you if they catch you out of uniform?”
“They’ll probably shoot me.”
“Then we’ll not stay here. We’ll get out of the country.”
“I’d thought something of that.”
“We’ll get out. Darling, you shouldn’t take silly chances” (FTA 223).
Hemingway’s female protagonist has a very cool mind which has a lot of strength. A woman, who is owner of such a mind, is shy also, Frederic tells:

She was beginning to be a little big with the child and she did not want me to see her. (*FTA* 237)

Woman’s essential qualities of her softness and her shyness are well presented by Hemingway through Catherine. She is also brave and adventurous as well. Catherine certainly appears to be a balanced amalgamation of the twentieth century new woman and the traditional woman. Whereas her hair is long and she dresses like a traditional woman and is shy, unlike Brett who is considered an epitome of twentieth century liberated woman with bobbed hair and tweed skirt. Catherine is westernized and bold in her thinking and completely free willed who decides to get pregnant by her lover out of wedlock.

Catherine presents phenomenal examples of courage and mental strength. Be it her fear of death in rain or the complications of her pregnancy, she deals with such issues with calmness and composure rather than making an issue out of them and creating trouble. She does has a premonition of her death when she talks of her fear of the rain:

“I am afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it.”
“No”
“And sometime I see you dead in it.” (*FTA* 114).

Catherine’s stoicism is exemplary. Her ability to reshape her surroundings by her force of will and her determination is indeed commendable. And these qualities which are manifest throughout the novel display themselves prominently when they row across the lake from Italy to Switzerland on a stormy night. Being a pregnant lady, it was not very easy for her to sit for such a long time and that too in such of a difficult situation of storm but she shows great courage:

“How are you, cat?” I asked.
“I’m all right where are we?”
“I don’t think we have more than about eight miles more.”
“That is a long way to row, you poor sweet. Aren’t you dead?”
“No, I’m all right” (FTA 224).

Even regarding the child birth and pregnancy Catherine always seems to be calm and composed. When Catherine is about to give birth to the child, Henry seems to be quite conscious about her pregnancy and delivery of the child. On the other hand Catherine seems comfortable enough and she responds to Frederic’s questions in a calm manner:

My head felt very clear and cold and I wanted to talk facts.
“Where will you have the baby?”
“I don’t know. The best place I can find.”
“How will you arrange it?”
“The best way I can. Don’t worry, darling. We may have several babies before the war is over.” (FTA 139)

Henry himself has always admired Catherine’s bravery and pays her tribute in an oft-quoted passage, of a philosophical reflection on the world and its brave children. This famous passage appears in Frederic’s retrospective narrative:

If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. 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. (FTA 222)

The passage points to Catherine’s tribulations and the death awaiting her on the other shore of the lake, in Switzerland. The last chapter of the novel reveals all the
significant qualities of Catherine. Her bravery and courage are depicted as she undergoes a long and arduous labor. Catherine is not afraid of anything in life nor of life after death. Even when on the verge of death she does not cry or show herself as a weak person but is anxious for Henry and the baby. She is not afraid of death. She begins to cry not because she is scared but because she feels that Henry must be having a difficult time. She is in a lot of pain and she wants to have the baby quickly but she cannot help it. Her only worry is that Henry should be happy. Henry Says:

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 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. (FTA 289)

When Catherine was dying Henry mourns:

“Poor, poor dear Cat. And this was the price you paid for sleeping together.”

(FTA 279)

When Catherine is on her deathbed, Henry goes to her bedside. She feels sorry for him and tries to comfort him whereas generally it should have been the other way around:

Catherine looked at me and smiled. I bent down over the bed and started to cry.

“Poor darling,” Catherine said very softly. She looked grey.

“You’re all right, Cat,” I said. “You’re going to be all right.”

“I’m going to die,” she said; then waited and said, “I hate it.” I took her hand.

“Don’t touch me,” she said. I let go of her hand. She smiled.

“Poor darling. You touch me all you want.” (FTA 292)
Even in her death she is a picture of heroism and courage. Moments before her death we find this touching scene in which Catherine faces death bravery and promises to stay with Henry in the night even after death:

“All right” Catherine said, “I’ll come and stay with you in nights.” She said.
“Please go out of the room.” Doctor said.
“Don’t worry, darling,” Catherine said. “I’m not a bit afraid. It’s just a dirty trick” (FTA 292).

Her last words were:
“I’m not afraid. I just hate it.”
“Do you want me to do anything, Cat?”
“Can I get you anything?”
Catherine smiled, “No.” Then a little later, “You won’t do our things with other girls or say the same things, will you?”
“Never”
“I want you to have girls, though.” (FTA 293)

Catherine faces death with fortitude and stoicism. She is so complementary to Henry that when she dies Henry feels that he has lost everything:

“I sat outside in the hall. Everything was gone inside of me… I could not think. I knew she was going to die and I prayed that she would not. Don’t let her die. Oh, God, Please don’t let her die. I’ll do anything for you if you won’t let her die. Please, please, please, dear God”… (FTA 292).

In the end, Henry spends a moment alone with Catherine in the room.
“It was like saying Good-bye to a statue” (FTA 293).

Catherine is like a monument on a pedestal after her death – a monument of love and loyalty and exemplary femininity with her soul yearning to spend the nights with her lover. Catherine has accepted the reality of death. That is why we never find
her scared of death. Catherine’s death is a biological trap. Viola Klein seems to be right when he says, “Man is trapped socially and biologically, life is game, and the only inescapable fact he has is death” (20). Catherine’s death is the most shocking incident Frederic faces in the whole novel. Malcom Cowley suggests: “There is a symbolic reason for Catherine’s death at this moment. When Frederic Henry made his farewell to arms, he became incapable of living in any sort of community, even a community of two: that is incapable of lasting sexual love. Catherine has to die because of modern critical interpretations of Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, the hero must henceforth live alone” (8).

Catherine’s death is an artistic necessity of *A Farewell to Arms* is to be an articulation of Hemingway’s tragic vision that “the world breaks everyone.” (*FTA* 222) Catherine’s death and the consequent destruction of the lovers’ separate peace are neither proof of Hemingway’s misogyny nor his subconscious desire to kill off the threat to masculine freedom that Catherine, the quintessential female represents. There is also educational significance of Catherine’s death. It makes Frederic Henry deeply aware of death as the supreme fact of life.

Hemingway has had a positive attitude towards women. He shows that woman has the power to change the nature of man. Hemingway’s woman is helpful to man at every step. Catherine proves herself as a true wife, participating in joys and sorrows equally. Hemingway presents his female characters in *A Farewell to Arms* equal to male characters in every sphere. And sometimes he even goes ahead of the normal circumstances to present the best form of women. Sandra concludes her essay, *Catherine Barkley and the Hemingway Code: Ritual and Survival* stating: “Catherine Barkley is the real thing. In creating her, Hemingway was more successful than perhaps he knew and most of his critics have realized” (148).

Hemingway has presented various other features of women through the characters of Miss Helen Ferguson, Miss Gage and other minor characters. The minor characters of Hemingway are functional in the thematic pattern and structural design of the novel. They appear in their own right and remain memorable despite their brief appearances in the novel’s action.
Helen Ferguson, a friend of Catherine Barkley, is a nurse by profession, she plays quite a significant role in the novel. The differences in the attitudes of Catherine and Ferguson, help in bringing out, the often neglected bold attitude of Catherine. Catherine’s pregnancy brings out, into sharp focus the two different mind-sets. Whereas Ferguson feels they should get married and have a legitimate relationship and a legitimate child, Catherine is hardly bothered about legalizing their marriage. She is more concerned about staying together.

Ferguson’s character in a way helps define the character of Catherine by providing juxtaposition to her at various points in the novel’s action. Quite opposite to the strictly conventional morality upheld by Ferguson who has an air of Puritanism, Catherine is shown as a modern 20th century woman who was ready to bear the child of her lover out of wedlock. Ferguson is thoroughly orthodox Christian which Catherine is not. Ferguson is rather committed to the conventional outlook on life, whereas Catherine is committed to the truth of experience.

Ferguson also comes across as a rather inflexible person, when it comes to social behavior. She would not brook the kind of bold defiance of conventional behavior Henry and Catherine make by producing a baby before marriage. When she sees Henry in the hospital at Milan after the latter’s desertion from the war she cannot even stand the sight of the man because he has got Catherine into trouble and, because he has not cared for social conventions:

“I can’t stand him.” Ferguson said. “He’s done nothing but ruin you with his sneaking Italian tricks. Americans are worse than Italians.”

“The Scotch are such a moral people,” Catherine said.

“I don’t mean that. I mean his Italian sneakiness.”

“Am I sneak, Fergy?”

“You are. You’re worse than sneaky. You’re like a snake. A snake with an Italian uniform : with a cape around your neck.”

“I haven’t got an Italian uniform now.”
“That’s just another example of your sneakiness. You had a love affair all summer and got this girl with child and now I suppose you’ll sneak off.”

I smiled at Catherine and she smiled at me.

“We will both sneak off.” She said.

“You are two of the same thing.” Ferguson said. I’m ashamed of you, Catherine Barkley. You have no shame and no honor and you’re as sneaky as he is.”

“Don’t Fregy,” Catherine said and patted her hand.

“Don’t denounce me. You know we like each other.”

“Take your hand away,” Ferguson said. Her face was red. “If you had any shame it would be different. But you’re God knows how many months gone with child and you think it’s a joke and are all smiles because your seducer’s come back. You have no shame and no feelings.” She began to cry. (FTA 220)

This whole piece of conversation shows Ferguson’s orthodox outlook towards life and at the same time it is also evident that Ferguson is a loyal and devoted friend who is concerned about the well being of Catherine. In her own ways, she tries and convinces Catherine to see the realities of the society that is wrecked by war and has lost all the conventional certainties. Ferguson in a way acts like a foil to Catherine’s character. As a matter of fact Ferguson is shown as deeply attached to Catherine. She is genuinely interested in her welfare. Because of her conservative mindset, Ferguson is often shown as furious and upset with Catherine. But the initial encounters of Helen Ferguson, in the novel depicts her, as a very devoted friend.

Ferguson inhabits every Italian setting in which Catherine appears. In fact, Ferguson seems to be Catherine’s constant companion. The two women enter the novel together, work together at the British Hospital in Gorizia and then get themselves transferred to the American Hospital in Milan. The two make such an inseparable pair of girls that B.S. Dahiya rightly calls them “Juno’s Swans” (70). Ferguson is deeply attached to Catherine, so much so that she finds it difficult to live
alone. Still when she discovers that Catherine has fallen in love with Henry, she does not mind leaving them alone:

“I’ll leave you two,” she said. “You get along very well without me.”
“Don’t go, Helen.” Miss Barkley said.
“I’d really rather. I must write some letters.”
“Good night,” I said.
“Good night, Mr. Henry.”
“Don’t write anything that will bother the censor.”
“Don’t worry. I only write about what a beautiful place we live in and how brave the Italians are.”
“That way you will be decorated.” (FTA 23)

This particular piece of conversation shows how Ferguson can rise to the situation and make healthy responses to changing circumstances of life. From finding an excuse for leaving a friend with her lover, to finding a suitable reply, Ferguson shows an agility of mind which is quite nearly comparable to that of Catherine. Ferguson is so deeply attached to Catherine that she can never ever imagine of any harm coming to Catherine. She again and again advises Catherine to get married with Henry but she can be nasty at times:

“Will you come to our wedding, Fergy?” I said to her once.
“You will never get married.”
“We will.”
“No, you won’t.”
“Why not?”
“You’ll fight before you’ll marry.”
“We never fight.”
“You’ve time yet.”
“We don’t fight.”
“You’ll die then. Fight or die. That’s what people do. They don’t marry.”

(FTA 98)

Ferguson’s behavior may appear cynical at this point. But this behavior should be viewed in the context of war, which has been there for long and has caused so much destruction, that to have developed such a cynical view is very natural. Helen has grown with the war, her brothers are a part of war and she has seen so much destruction and devastation that she cannot believe that anyone would have the luck to marry and live happily. The war has created havoc in everybody’s life. Ferguson’s life was also in no less tension. Her two brothers are at war. Her friend is going to have a war baby. She doesn’t know what is going to happen next. So it is quite understandable that she is jittery:

I reached for her hand. “Don’t take hold of me.” She said. “I’m not crying. Maybe you’ll be all right you two. But watch out you don’t get her in trouble. You get her in trouble and I’ll kill you.”

“I won’t get her in trouble.”

“Well watch out then. I hope you’ll be all right. You have a good time.”

“We have a fine time.”

“I won’t.”

“Don’t fight then and don’t get her into trouble.”

“Mind you watch out. I don’t want her with any of these war babies.” (FTA 98)

Later Ferguson’s fears come true. The lovers do not get married. Catherine gets into trouble. She gets a war baby and she dies also. Hemingway uses Ferguson as a device in the tragic pattern of the novel.

Another significant minor female character in the novel is Miss Gage, another nurse at the hospital. Opposed to the orthodox and conventional Ferguson, Miss Gage in neither inhibited by any taboos or conventions, nor bound by any rules and regulations. She is one of those girls who were beginning, around the time of World
War I, to assert their right of equality with men, even to defy the social conventions. Between the orthodox Ferguson and unorthodox Gage, Catherine maintains a balance by showing reverence for social conventions but at the same time defying them if situation requires so.

The appearance of Miss Gage is rather refreshing. Whenever she appears on the scene, she brings ease and joy, so rare in the midst of the long war. She also provides a contrast to Ferguson. Gage is drawn towards the male protagonist. Though her relationship with Henry is straight forward, but her ministrations to him are tinged with the sexual flattery which Henry understands, enjoys and can recall in accurate detail: he says that she washes him:

“very gently and smoothly.” (FTA 84)
and she
“giggles at his compliments.” (FTA 86)
She drinks with him, scolds him, hides his empty bottles from Miss Van Campen and is even willing to lie for him. Henry naturally likes Miss Gage and tells her repeatedly that she’s

“a fine girl …. awfully damned nice … awful nice.” (FTA 89)

Against all rules she cheerfully serves the wounded hero, with whatever drink he prefers to have:

Miss Gage brought a pitcher of water and a glass. I drank three glasses and then they left me and I looked out the window …. back to sleep. (FTA 66)

And then:
She opened the armoire and held up the vermouth bottle. It was nearly empty.
“I put the other bottle from under the bed in there too,” she said. “Why didn’t you ask me for a glass?”
“I thought may be you wouldn’t let me have it.”
“I’d have had some with you.”
“You’re a fine girl.” (FTA 68)

And a little later she actually drinks with Henry. She has no hangover of any taboo. In comparison with the strict women of the British hospital like Miss Van Campen and Helen Ferguson, Gage comes across as a very calm, composed and relaxed person. Her ease and unselfconsciousness with which she drinks with Henry shows how lightly she takes social taboos. Miss Gage believes in living happily, in the philosophy eat, drink and be merry. Miss Gage is always ready to defy the conventions without having the slightest hesitation in doing that.

Miss Gage shows total irreverence to the conventional morality of not telling a lie or of not taking liquor or of being free with male strangers. She is completely uninhibited by the social taboos and morals. She not only provides a sort of comic relief in between Henry’s tiffs with Miss Van Campen but also provides fresh air in the otherwise suffocating atmosphere of war.

Thus, situated between an orthodox Ferguson and a liberated Gage, Catherine emerges as a fine blend of tradition and modernity far from being merely Henry’s shadow, she is a woman of enduring courage and conviction abiding love and faith. Behind her soft looks, is an assertive and independent woman who defines the course of her life on her own terms and conditions.


---. *A Farewell to Arms*. Web. 10-08-2012.


Fadiman, Clifton. *A Farewell to Arms*. Web. 10-08-2012.


