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Fredric Henry: A Lost Hero in Hemingways Novel: A Farewell to Arms: An Existential Analysis

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Abstract: ***In Hemingway's earlier novels such as The Sun Also Rises, A Farewell to Arms and many of his short stories, the major characters such as Jack Barnes, Frederic Henry and Nick Adam experience emptiness and alienation. These characters experience lostness and nothingness. They suffer from insomnia and this makes them cry bitterly. Frederic Henry, from the very beginning, remains uprooted. His participation in war and his involvement in dancing parties, sex and even his love for Catherine is nothing else but to avoid reality and adopt an attitude of 'bad faith'.***
Keywords: Bad faith, Lostness, Reality, Being, Unauthentic Existence

I. OBJECTIVE

By making an existential analysis of Henry's life, the paper aims to make it clear that Henry, who is a lieutenant in the army, is a lost character. From the very beginning, his life is without any motto that may sustain his life. He remains so till the end of the novel when Catherine dies.

II. INTRODUCTION

Fredric Henry in Hemingway's novel 'A Farewell to Arms' is an American serving in the Italian Army. After returning from leave to his unit, he goes to the war-front to take part in a battle and is hit by a mortar shell. When he regains consciousness, he sees that one of the drivers Passini is lying dead near him. He himself had been wounded in the head and legs. He is brought to the field hospital and is then taken to a hospital in Milan.

Henry's participation in the war is more of a spectator's than that of a patriotic soldier. Earl Rovit writes that Henry has 'volunteered to serve in the Italian Ambulance Corps for reasons which are ever made clear. He has neither patriotism nor hatred of the Austrians. In fact, the war and his involvement in it is as unreal experience to him as anything else in thoroughly meaningless and unconnected life'[1]. Henry does not know why he has joined Army. When Catherine asks him why he has joined Army, he replies, "I don't know. There isn't explanation for everything."[2] Even when he goes to take part in the war on the front and gets wounded, he keeps a marked detachment. He does not know why he has left his country. Later, he states, "This war did not have anything to me. It seemed no more dangerous to me … than war in the movies" (p.39). Similarly in his relations with Catherine, in the beginning, Henry manifests no commitment which again shows his non- participation in an action. For him, this relation was a little "Better than going evening to whore houses" (p.84).

III. ANALYSIS

From the beginning of the novel, Henry's life is continuously marked with non-commitment and lostness. He says good-bye to the war and tries to find some meaningful mode of authentic existence in Catherine's love. But there also he gets deluded. His desire to set up a household with Catherine gets shattered to dust. After Catherine's death in child birth, Henry comes out of the hospital with nothing in his hand. The following observation on his ironic situation is stated by himself in the novel:

> '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 turned back and ran towards the end. When there was 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 towards the fire and then back towards the end and swarmed on to the cool end and finally off into the fire (p.282).

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In the ironic situation of the ants, there reflects the situation of Frederic Henry's own life and that of man in general. Baker states man's situation in general in the war in the following words:

> 'Some immediately die in flame as Catherine is now dying. Others like
> Lieutenant Henry who has survived a French mortar explosion, will manage
> to get away, their bodies permanently scarred, their future course uncertain…
> except that they will die in the end."[3]

After Catherine's death, Henry is left with nothing. He feels lost and disillusioned. His future course again becomes uncertain. The only reality left for him now is death from which he always tried to run away.

Sartre says: 'Since freedom is being without any support, without Any springboard, the project must be renewed permanently in order to be."[4] He further states that man is choosing himself perpetually otherwise he should fall back into the mere existence of a thing-in-itself [5]. It can also be said that freedom is an achievement or a new realization. It is in fact a discovery by the self of its own nature which was hidden from it due to the veil of 'nescience' or ignorance. An existential man is free in his emotions and passions. He is free in his voluntary acts, On the face of danger, man can adopt either of the two attitudes; he can face up to it or yield to emotions. His choice alone proves to be the decisive power.

Analyzing Fredric Henry from this point of view, it is clear that Henry, at the moment of being singled out, is confronted with a choice between life and death. Either he can face the situation of death or can flee away from the danger. Henry makes the choice of life by plunging into the river. But at the same, by fleeing away from the war, he is also escaping from his freedom and responsibility. Henrys' this choice is an Unauthentic choice. If, after fleeing from the clutches of Italian officers, he had decided to continue his life under the circumstances of war, it would have been his authentic choice.

Henry, in his consciousness, tries to suppress the feeling of war. His continuous effort to evade the reality of the war is nothing else but 'bad faith'. Sartre writes that a man is in 'bad faith' when he knows the truth and tries to hide it from himself. A person in 'bad faith' is conscious of his being in 'bad faith'. Acting in 'bad faith', a person is the deceiver and the deceived at the same time. "In bad faith, I am running away from the truth, but I cannot really be ignorant of the fact that I am running."[6] Henry continues to be in 'bad faith'. For example, at the hotel, Catherine asks if he does not want to read the paper, Henry replies: 'No' I don't want the paper now' (p.219). He does not want to read the paper because it reminds him of the impending threat to his physical existence. Henry's retreat is his new choice for creating 'separate peace'. His plunge into the given Tagliamen to escape the 'carabiniere' is symbolically death of war and the beginning of a new life of love. Henry himself says:

> You had lost your cars and yours men as floorwalker loses the stock
> of his department in a fire. You were out of it now…… You had no
> more obligations…. It was not any show any more. I was made to …..
> eat and drink and sleep with Catherine (pp.203-204).

In Catherine's love for him, Henry now attempts to discover the foundation of his being. By Catherine's love, he tries to justify himself. He attempts to possess Catherine's freedom as a self-enslaved freedom which Sartre calls as one of these avenues of flight that man finds in order to escape into bad faith and inauthentic existence'. [7]

Henry has learnt to love from Catherine. He has become 'aware of what is meaningful in life. Finally committed at last to another's welfare.'[8] But at this very moment, he loses the very thing that has brought his existence into a situation form where Henry chooses an authentic mode of existence. Catherine dies and Henry again feels lost and purposeless. Catherine's death is also the death of Henry's aspirations, his expectations and his motive that had made his life meaningful. Coming out the room where Catherine was lying dead, Henry narrates:

> But after I had got them out and shut the door and turned off the light
> it wasn't any good. It was like saying good-bye to statue. After a while
> I went and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain (p.287).

According to Carlos Baker, it is the 'finality and totality of his loss'[9] Catherine's death makes Henry permanently wounded. Dahiya writes 'Not even his own wound and his experiences of near death with the Carabinieri affect him so much as does the death of his beloved'[10].

IV. CONCLUSIONS

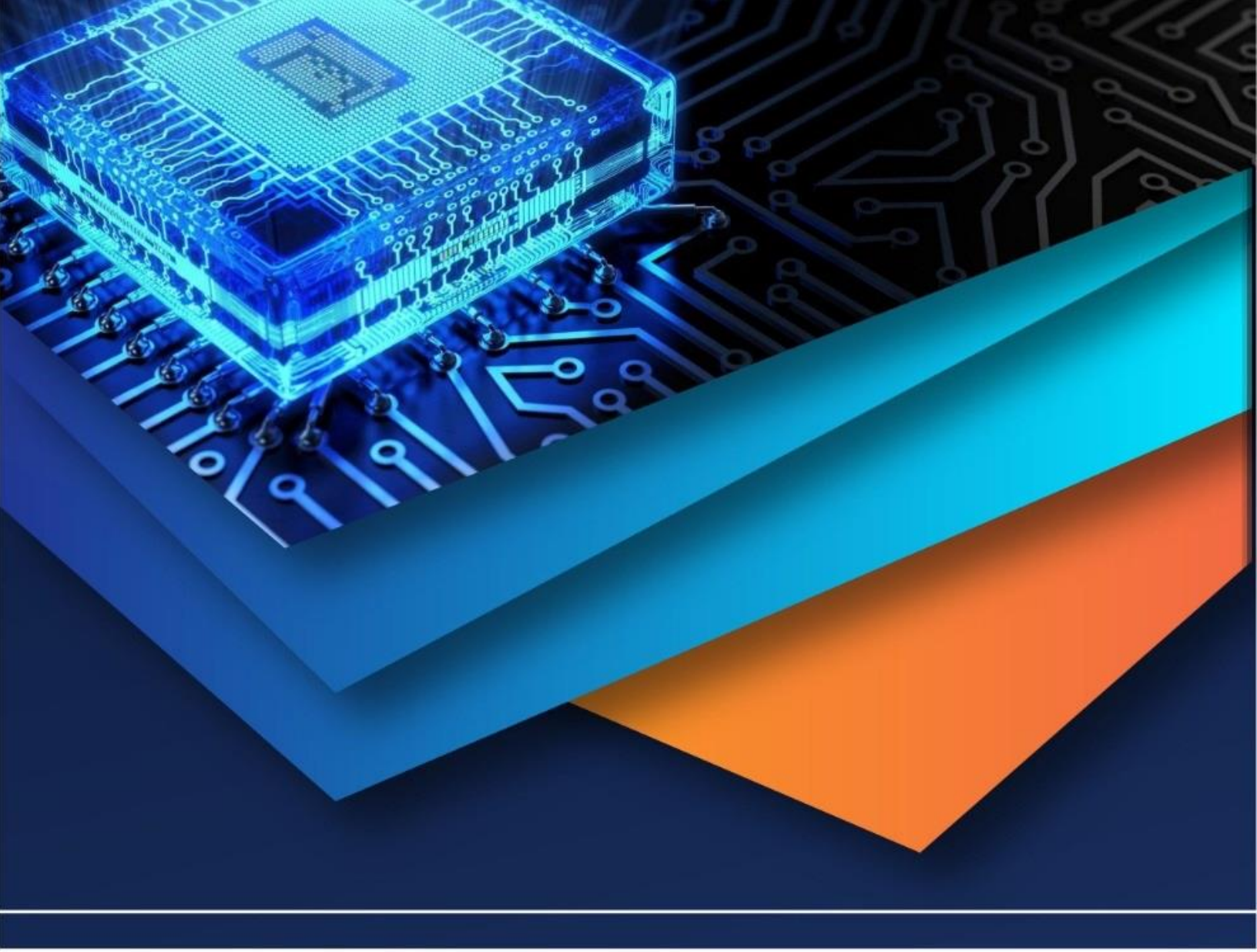
Thus Henry's own life experiences during the war are experiences of nothingness or lostness. He lost his country and came to Europe to participate in the war. His spiritual non-participation is nothing else but unauthentic mode of living as he is not fully committed on the war-front. His amorous relations with other girls and in the beginning with Catherine also were nothing else but his attempts to run away from his reality.

Henry's escape into physical pleasures is nothing else but one of the 'avenues of flight' from futility of his existence. When the war poses a threat to his existence, he deserts it and thus flees away from his responsibility and freedom. But at the same time, he makes another choice. His love for Catherine gives directions to his life. But with Catherine's death, his existence again becomes directionless. He feels a desperate sadness and an utter disappointment. His existence turns to be a boat without an oar. Catherine's death in childbirth is the fatal wound that wrecks Henry badly and he is left with nothing at the end. He gets fully lost and experiences alienation and despair. No doubt Henry seems to make certain choices but these choices lead him further into meaninglessness and lostness.

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