



## The Symbol of Rain in the Novel “a Farewell to Arms”

**Kandilat Iusupova**

In the name of Mirzo Ulugbek National University of Uzbekistan, "Practical English and Literature"  
Teacher of the department, kandilat@mail.ru

**Annotation:** In this article we will discuss the symbol of the rain in the novel “A Farewell to Arms” by Ernest Hemingway. This novel was written in 1929, it is a first-person account of an American, Frederic Henry, serving as a lieutenant in the ambulance corps of the Italian Army. The novel describes a love affair between the expatriate from America and an English nurse, Catherine Barkley. The novel is divided into five sections; Frederic Henry narrates the story in the first-person. Hemingway depicts weather realistically in “A Farewell to Arms” but he uses it for symbolic purposes as well. Rain, often equated with life and growth, stands for death in this novel.

**Key words:** a dialogue, a novel, characters, an army, love affair, a nurse, to analyse, to describe.

### MAIN PART

“A Farewell to Arms ” was begun during his time at Willis M.Spear’s guest ranch at Wyoming’s Bighorns<sup>1</sup>. Some pieces of the novel were written in Piggott, Arkansas, at the home of his then-wife Pauline Pfeiffer<sup>2</sup>, and the Mission Hills, Kansas, while she was awaiting delivery of their baby<sup>3</sup>. Pauline underwent a caesarean section as Hemingway was writing the scene about Catherine Barkley’s childbirth<sup>4</sup>.

In the novel there is a symbol of the rain a lot. Rain symbolizes death. At the beginning of the novel, Frederic Henry describes an outbreak of cholera brought by the rain, which caused the deaths of thousands. Besides that, rain is a symbol of diasater throughout the novel. The idea of the season or climate is related to the natural and mythological structure of the symbol. In the very first chapter, the pattern is established. The summer is followed by autumn and a bleakness appears over the landscape, this is followed by winter and the rain which is begun in the fall, becomes “the permanent rain” bring diseases and the death in its wake. The rain begin in October at the end of October at the end of summer as Henry is about to return to the front after to the front after his convalescence and love affair with Catherine during the summer in Milan. Then the rain continues intermittently throughout the retreat and as Henry flees to Stresa and a reunion with Catherine, the rain falls steadily in the background.

The symbol of the rain also represents survival and life for Frederic. He dives into the Tagliamento river in order to escape being shot. His emergence from the water is a type of baptism as he emerges with a new identity, that of a civilian, and he sheds his old identity as a soldier. Rain also symbolizes both life and death. In Chapter 1, when rains come, it is not life-giving rain. The rain causes 7,000

<sup>1</sup>Spear-o-Wigwam history

<sup>2</sup> Hemingway-Pfeiffer Home Page. Arkansas State University. Archived from the original on February 16, 2007. Retrieved January 30, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> “A Writer’s Haunts: Where He Worked and Where He Lived”.

<sup>4</sup>Meyers, Jeffrey. Hemingway: A Biography. Da Capo Press, 1999, p.219.

men to die from cholera. In Chapter 29, the rains create mud, and the mud is what traps Frederic's vehicles during the calamitous retreat, eventually leading to Frederic's shooting of a deserting soldier as well as leading to his own desertion.

"At the start of the winter came the permanent rain and with the rain came the cholera. But it was checked and in the end only seven thousand died of it in the army"<sup>5</sup>.

"I'm afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it"<sup>6</sup>.

"He leaves the hospital and walks back to his hotel in the rain"<sup>7</sup>.

In these examples rain can symbolize many things. It can represent unhappiness, rebirth, foreboding, determination, the breaking of a drought, and a pause for introspection. It has been used as a symbol for many thousands of years, perhaps most notably in the floods in the bible.

In the novel it rains almost continuously during the chapter when the tide of battle turns and the Italians begin their retreat from Caporetto – and from the Germans who have joined the fighting. The rain turns to snow one evening, holding out hope that the offensive will cease, but the snow quickly melts and the rain resumes. During a discussion among the drivers about the wine they are drinking with dinner, the driver named Aymo says, "Tomorrow maybe we drink rainwater". Hemingway by this time has developed the rain symbolism to such a degree that the reader experiences a genuine sense of foreboding – and indeed, the following day will bring death to Henry's disintegrating unit. At the last chapter when Henry leaves the hospital for lunch during Catherine's protracted, agonizing delivery, "The day was cloudy but the sun was trying to come through" – a literal ray of hope. During the operation, however, he looks out the window and sees that it is raining. Just after the nurse has told him that the baby is dead, Henry looks outside again and "could see nothing but the hospital and walks back to his hotel in the rain. In fact, the final word in *A Farewell to Arms* is "rain", evidence of weather's important place in the story overall.

Hemingway doesn't quite trust us to detect the rain/snow pattern of symbolism and understand its meaning; therefore he underlines the significance of precipitation in his book by having Catherine tell Henry that she sees them dead in the rain. And so the weather symbolism in *A Farewell to Arms* is perhaps unnecessarily obvious. Yet Hemingway's use of this literary device is hardly rote symbolism for its own sake. Rain and snow both drive his plot and maintain our interest, as we hold our breaths every time it rains in the novel, praying that Catherine will not perish during that scene. Thus, while writing a brutally realistic saga of life during wartime, Ernest Hemingway also crafted a novel as literary as the great-war stories that preceded *A Farewell to Arms*. Arguably it is as powerful as any story ever told.

The author uses symbols of nature, most significantly rain to portray melancholy and hopelessness of a certain individual. As time progresses, the existence of rain turns Frederic into a paranoid, insecure man as he begins to shift back to a reality of war and useless violence. The theme that grief turns an individual from being utterly happy into a sick, lonely person who switches their perspective from fantasy. Rain distinctly exemplifies in being a powerful symbol of the inescapable fragmentation of hope in life. Rain in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* is a constant symbol of impending calamity. It serves as a forewarning of bad things to come, from physical pain to emotional struggles and even death. Rain also sets the somber mood of the novel, reflecting the direction the war is going and the feeling that people have about it. Ultimately, rain connects all of the many tragedies in the book and iterates the message of the devastating affects of war and the death and suffering that goes hand-in-hand with it. From the very beginning of the novel, we are told of a "permanent rain".

"*A Farewell to Arms*" is a naturalistic novel, telling the truth about the effects of war in human life. But one should not read it as so, one should grasp the underlying symbolism that controls the novel, the symbolism of the deep central antithesis between the image of war and death as manifested through the plains. Over and above this, Hemingway has also used rain as a symbol of disaster,

<sup>5</sup> Hemingway, E. *A Farewell to Arms*. Chapter 1.p.1.

<sup>6</sup> Hemingway, E. *A Farewell to Arms*. Chapter 19.p.78

<sup>7</sup> Hemingway, E. *A Farewell to Arms*. Chapter 41.p.178

consistently. In the beginning rain brings the death of seven thousand men in the army. Catherine is scared of the rain because sometimes she sees herself and sometimes Henry dead in the rain. They bid goodbye in the rain, this is followed by the retreat also covered in rain, to Henry's flight and then eventual escape to Switzerland and ultimately Catherine's death are all marked by the presence of rain as a background. The significance of rain as a symbol of disaster is beyond doubt and is of great importance in the novel.

"A Farewell to Arms" is a story of one man's hopes and fears. Frederick Henry doesn't achieve his hopes but the setbacks don't keep him from trying.

## CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, we may say that, theoretically speaking, then, it would be fair to say that A Farewell to Arms is a tragedy. The work inspires pity and fear and, as Aristotle claims, pity and fear are the two emotions which must be produced by a tragedy in order for a catharsis of these emotions to take place. The most pertinent meaning of the novel lies in the idea of hope during a time of war. It's a juxtaposition of love and war in that Henry and Catherine fall in love despite the war setting and develop a relationship with each other by overcoming the struggles of war. Hemingway portrays the cruel realities of war and how relationships can be formed through such a tough time. With the usage of the symbol of the rain he shows that the people serving use their hopes as distractions of the harsh reality they are living in. The story takes place during World War One. World War one was a time full of sadness and disillusionment. Rain serves in the novel as a potent symbol of the inevitable disintegration of happiness in life.

## THE LIST OF USED LITERATURE

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