

# The Theme of Loss in Hemingway's War Novels: Reading from the Viewpoint of Feelings

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## Introduction

Ernest Hemingway's literary style owes a great deal to his experience as a reporter for the *Kansas City Star* after high school. In addition to the great influence this experience had on his writing style, he carried the mindset of "being on the scene" with him throughout his career. He actually participated in all three of the wars that eventually became the settings of his war novels; along the way, he witnessed and experienced many terrible events and incidents. During World War I, he joined in the Italian front as an ambulance driver and was severely wounded. During the Spanish Civil War, Hemingway reported on the conditions in his beloved Spain for the North American Newspaper Alliance. Moreover, he was actively involved in World War II as a war correspondent.

As a result of his own war experiences, Hemingway published three war novels in his lifetime: two set in Italy and one, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, set in Spain.

His first war novel, *A Farewell to Arms*,<sup>1</sup> is based on firsthand knowledge of World War I. Twenty-one years after the publication of *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway returned to the Italy setting for his last war novel, *Across the River and into the Trees*.<sup>2</sup> The geographical backdrop for both *A Farewell to Arms* and *Across the River and into the Trees* is Italy, but the time periods differ: the former is set during World War I, whereas the latter is set at the close of World War II. In *Across the River and into the Trees*, the two wars are reflected upon from the viewpoint of an old colonel.

The two novels bear several common traits. In addition to sharing a setting, both works also relate the stories of loving couples. J. A. Donovan, Jr., considers *A Farewell to Arms* to be "a fresh and touching love story" that follows

Hemingway's "first hand experience in an ambulance unit with the Italian Army and later infantry action in World War I" and *Across the River and into the Trees* to be "another love story, with a Venetian and postwar backdrop" (n. pag).

Hemingway himself entered the Italian Campaign in World War I and suffered a serious leg injury while there, giving him an experience that formed the basis for the similarly injured heroes of *A Farewell to Arms* and *Across the River and into the Trees*. Although Hemingway did not clearly embrace an antiwar stance in the novels, he wrote the characters' deaths into the conclusions of the works. Arthur Waldhorn suggests that "*A Farewell to Arms* is Hemingway's first full-scale treatment of mortality" (114).

Hemingway's war novels consist of more than just his memories of the war, however. In *A Farewell to Arms*, as Waldhorn points out, "Hemingway blends fact and fantasy" (113). Hemingway fell in love with a nurse named Agnes von Kurowsky during his time in Italy, but their relationship collapsed. Waldhorn points out an example of Hemingway's mixture of fact and fantasy:

Frederic's knee wound is analogous to Hemingway's, but not the head injury. Moreover, though Hemingway knew about the retreat from Caporetto, he played no part in it or in any act of desertion. Still further, his love for his own wartime nurse, Agnes von Kurowsky, was never consummated. (113)

Michael Reynolds continues along this line of thought, saying, "Frederic Henry's experience on the Italian front bears only superficial resemblance to that of his author. Frederic is older, more sexually experienced, more widely traveled, and better read than was Hemingway at nineteen" (110). In a dialogue between Hemingway and Carlos Baker, "Hemingway pointed out that he, not Frederic, was wounded on the Piave. Lt. Henry's wounding, he said, was on a different river altogether" (Reynolds 110).

While *A Farewell to Arms* has been widely regarded as one of Hemingway's most important works, *Across the River and into the Trees* has been roundly criticized despite the author's absolute confidence in the work: "Hemingway believed it was the best book he had ever written (Reynolds 212)" (Stoltzfus 19). Just after the publication of *Across the River and into the Trees*, "negative

criticism was almost unanimous . . . The novel was characterized as disappointing, trivial, garrulous, and tired” (Stoltzfus 19). At that time, Donovan also commented that *Across the River and into the Trees* “is a jaded, sometimes boring, often vulgar, and rather unconvincing story by a writer who is a frustrated old soldier and middleaged connoisseur” (n. pag). Bombarded with harsh, unexpected criticism, Hemingway attributed the unpopularity of the novel to its complexity. In fact, in an interview in the *New York Times Book Review* Hemingway defended himself by saying that the critics were confused by the novel’s experimental complexity (Breit 14). Explaining the construction of the work, Hemingway said, “In writing I have moved through arithmetic, through plane geometry and algebra, and now I am in calculus” (Brucoli 62).

As recently as 2002, Waldhorn continued to point out the failure of the work. “Where once he had rendered a scene dramatically and objectively,” Waldhorn argues, “here Hemingway frequently intrudes flabby excesses that undercut the desired effect” (181).

John Paul Russo also finds fault in the work, stating that “Hemingway labored over the progression and disjunction of the opening and closing chapters, which provoke an unsettling, uncanny response” (155). Complex time shifts in *Across the River and into the Trees* makes the novel hard to comprehend:

Chronologically, the novel begins with Chapter 2 . . . “the day before yesterday” . . . Chapters 3–15 comprise “Yesterday” . . . Chapters 16–39 narrate events of “today” . . . Projected as an eternal tomorrow, outside of the present according to the strict chronology of the novel, the swamp scenes and duck shoot comprise Chapter 1 and Chapters 40–44; Cantwell dies in the afternoon (*ART* Chapter 45). (Russo 155)

Still, *Across the River and into the Trees* garners more praise these days than it did in Hemingway’s time. Waldhorn states that “the novel might deserve more acclaim than it has received. Unfortunately, too much else lacks discipline and blunders off into fulsome puffery of ‘Papa’ Hemingway’s generalizations” (181).

Citing an improvement in reader comprehension, Stoltzfus insists that

“readers familiar with metafiction and the *nouveau roman* have little difficulty with *Across the River and into the Trees*’s circular structure, time shifts, and inner resonance, and the complexity of the novel is no longer daunting or, worse, dismissible” (19). According to Stoltzfus, the book’s “experimental complexity has elicited a number of revaluations that may indeed reveal a calculus of writing” (19).

In addition, the effect of scenery has also been the subject of analysis for several scholars. Waldhorn appreciates the depiction of scenery in *Across the River and into the Trees*: “through the streets of Venice to the market — these not only describe the external environment as Cantwell sees it but also help to define his inward response to it. Sometimes, as elsewhere in Hemingway’s writing, the effect is achieved by contrasting the protagonist’s response with another’s” (180). Stoltzfus also points out that “sight in *Across the River and into the Trees* plays an important role in recapturing the past” (22–23).

This paper will deal with Hemingway’s two war novels that take place in Italy. Although Hemingway chose similar contexts and events to form his narrative environments, his descriptions of war and loss greatly differ. This paper will also include a rereading of *Across the River and into the Trees*, whose reputation has improved in recent years. In addition to analyzing the effects that “sinister” atmospheres and symbols have in the two novels, my comparison of the two novels will illuminate the prevalent sense of loss common to Hemingway’s war novels set in Italy. The purposes of this paper are to focus on expressions and symbols that give readers a sensory experience of circumstances and plots and to reconsider Hemingway’s war novels through the lenses of these descriptions. I aim to clarify Hemingway’s way of portraying loss in his war novels by contrasting the two novels, whose assessments have traditionally been generally opposite.

### **I. Sinister atmospheres pervading the novels**

This chapter will explore the effects of “sinister” atmospheres that lead to later misfortune. Both novels contain many sinister scenes of this sort.

First, the works feature ill-matched couples. In these two war novels, the nature of the ill-matched couples lead readers to anticipate their eventual collapse; both novels actually end with a partner’s death, as well.

In *A Farewell to Arms*, the love between a wounded soldier and a battlefield nurse comes off as immoral and selfish. Although the nurse, Catherine Barkley, elects to take the night shift of her own accord, she ends up falling in love with the soldier, Frederic Henry. Their relationship leads to an unwanted pregnancy, which Catherine attempts to terminate by herself. The novel makes it clear that the abortion ends in failure, as Catherine says, "I did everything. I took everything but it didn't make any difference" (*AFA* 138). To make matters worse, Catherine and Frederic attempt an escape to Switzerland, abandoning their duties.

The couple in *Across the River and into the Trees*, Richard Cantwell and Renata, are as far apart in age as a parent and child. Richard, an American soldier over fifty years of age and three times divorced, strikes a discordant match with Renata, a nineteen-year-old rich girl. Renata herself is cognizant of their disproportionate ages, too. She realizes their imbalance and asks him, ". . . how would you like to be a girl nineteen years old in love with a man over fifty years old that you knew was going to die?" (*ART* 65).

Second, the major characters destined to die at the ends of the two works also have physical problems.

Catherine has an unwanted pregnancy because of her sexual indiscretion and has to escape in a certain condition. In addition, her narrow hips are cause for anxiety in childbirth. When she says, "The doctor said I was rather narrow in the hips and it's all for the best if we keep young Catherine small," the reader learns that she cannot give birth to a big baby (*AFA* 294); however, her apprehension proves prescient as her baby turns out to be too large for natural childbirth. Catherine also believes her baby is a girl, saying that "she's been very good . . . She makes very little trouble" (*AFA* 293), but she is pregnant with a baby boy, contrary to her wishes and expectations.

In *Across the River and into the Trees*, Cantwell is seriously ill with heart disease and has little time left to live. Due to his history of repeated heart attacks, Cantwell takes two mannitol hexanitrate tablets so that he can speed up his blood flow and pass a certain medical examination. When Renata asks him about his doctor's diagnosis, he lies:

"Will you do your best not to die?"

“Yes.”

“What did the doctor say?”

“So-so.”

“Not worse?”

“No,” he lied. (*ART* 65)

During the conversation with his friend the *Gran Maestro*, who also suffers from heart disease, Cantwell’s “heart rose and he felt it choke him” (*ART* 98). Although he tries to keep his heart attacks secret from Renata, she eventually comes around to the fact that he had had several heart attacks and says to Cantwell, “You did not tell me there were more . . . You owe it to me to tell me” (*ART* 98). Determined to keep his condition secret from Renata, Cantwell thinks, “I’ll never tell you about that, Daughter. That’s just a noise heard off stage in my heart. My lousy chicken heart. That bastard heart certainly couldn’t hold the pace” (*ART* 210). During the duck hunting expedition Cantwell takes just before his death, the description of his sweating emphasizes the grave state of the condition: “The Colonel, feeling himself sweating, although he knew he was protected from the wind by his field jacket, took two tablets from the bottle and a sip of gin from his flask” (*ART* 212).

Moreover, the doomed main characters also sense their inevitable death. The probability of their deaths is palpable in their conversation, remarks by the people around them, and descriptions that hint at looming death.

A sense of foreboding emerges from a rain scene in *A Farewell to Arms*. Catherine confesses to Frederic in the rain, “I’m afraid of the rain” (*AFA* 125). Pressed by Frederic for an explanation, Catherine tells him, “I’m afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it.” This revelation implies her later misfortune and evokes in the reader a sense that her death is likely (*AFA* 126). She deplors how powerless human beings are in protecting themselves and says to Frederic, “I can keep you safe . . . But nobody can help themselves” (*AFA* 126); however, this remark implies her destiny, not Frederic’s. The overall ill omen persists throughout their conversation, with the unrelenting rain creating a portentous mood. Catherine’s impending misfortune can be read from her pregnant utterance, tears, and rain. On the effect of rain, Waldhorn argues:

Always too there is the rain . . . All this is prefigured in the opening chapter: "All the country *wet* and brown and *dead* with autumn . . . the troops were muddy and *wet* in their capes; their rifles were *wet*" (italics added). Until at last comes the "permanent rain" and death . . . What Hemingway projects in the opening chapter is a macrocosmic metaphor that arches the entire novel, ironically reducing the scale of the fictional events to microcosmic proportion. (117–18)

Cantwell and Renata both know that he does not have much time left. "Throughout the novel Cantwell is obsessed by loss and death," Russo says, and several scenes support this notion (157). Cantwell treats his heart trouble as a joke, for example, and says to Renata, "Only it is the main muscle. It works as perfectly as a Rolex Oyster Perpetual. The trouble is you cannot send it to the Rolex representative when it goes wrong. When it stops, you just do not know the time. You're dead" (*ART* 98). When he sees Renata's lovely face, he thinks about his last moment, "I'll get killed sometime that way" (*ART* 71). Cantwell ponders death in another scene, saying, "It comes to you in small fragments that hardly show where it has entered. It comes, sometimes, atrociously . . . It comes in bed to most people, I know, like love's opposite number. I have lived with it nearly all my life and the dispensing of it has been my trade" (*ART* 155–56). Conscious of the prospect of death, Renata also asks him for a promise: "Don't lie to me please, darling, when we have so little time" (*ART* 170).

In *A Farewell to Arms*, Catherine's colleague Helen Ferguson, another nurse, makes significant remarks about the relationship between Frederic and Catherine. As if foreseeing their later collapse, Helen says, "You'll never get married . . . You'll fight before you'll marry . . . You'll die then. Fight or die. That's what people do" (*AFA* 108). Worried about Catherine, she demands that Frederic keep his lover happy: "But watch out you don't get her in trouble. You get her in trouble and I'll kill you" (*AFA* 108). When she hears of Catherine's pregnancy, Ferguson grieves and insults Frederic, saying, "You had a love affair all summer and got this girl with child and now I suppose you'll sneak off" (*AFA* 247).

In *A Farewell to Arms*, the characters' personality flaws and self-centeredness also evoke a sense of foreboding. Frederic is not pleased with Catherine's

pregnancy; far from being glad, Frederic even sees her pregnancy as a trap. Catherine is concerned about his confusion and asks, "And you don't feel trapped?" (*AFA* 139). His reply betrays his self-centeredness: "Maybe a little . . . You always feel trapped biologically" (*AFA* 139). "Never do we see him sacrifice himself for Catherine," Reynolds observes. "Their escape into Switzerland is to save his life, not hers. Her pregnancy, which is half his responsibility, eventually kills her" (124–25). Moreover, Frederic's and Catherine's doctor do not seem to take her childbirth seriously, acting as if it is somebody else's problem. Frederic falls asleep when Catherine's contractions start, for example, while the doctor lies on the bed smoking a cigarette during the noon recess of Catherine's difficult delivery. His lack of skill, manifested in his inability to apply prompt and appropriate medical treatment during the complicated delivery, plants the seeds of uneasiness in the reader. He ends up performing a Caesarean section after Catherine exhausts her energy. In addition, the doctor apparently recommends beer, which pregnant women usually abstain from. Catherine says to Frederic, "The doctor says beer will be good for me and keep her [the baby] small" (*AFA* 293).

In *Across the River and into the Trees*, the conversations between Cantwell and Renata give away empty feelings; they often say things without any true feeling and make fun of each other. Cantwell says, "Now, Daughter, let us resume the having of the fun" (*ART* 71). Renata also says, "We are having fun" (*ART* 82). Making his stance more explicit, Cantwell says, "When will you learn that I might joke against you because I love you?" (*ART* 63). Renata says to Cantwell, "And send them [Cantwell and Renata's five sons] to the five corners of the world . . . It sounded as though there were [five corners to the world] when I said it. And now we are having fun again, aren't we?" (*ART* 70). Extraordinary fantasies are also part of Renata's palette of remarks: "But we're going to have fun again and whatever the bad thing was is gone now . . . I want to be the moon, too" (*ART* 70). From their vapid, empty conversations, the reader gets the sense that their love lacks a firm basis in reality.

The two novels contain descriptions and sinister atmospheres that hint at the respective couples' endings and their later misfortunes. Next, I will examine the meanings of the symbols that Hemingway employed in the two war novels and reread them from the viewpoint of feelings.

## II. The effects of symbols

This chapter will deal with the meanings of symbols that Hemingway wrote into the two war novels. Chapter I discussed the sense of foreboding created by rain in *A Farewell to Arms*.

Rain as a sinister symbol, which implies later misfortune, is apparent in many scenes of *A Farewell to Arms*. These sorts of dark, rainy scenes include Frederic's attack of jaundice, the scene where Catherine is afraid of rain, a parting scene where Frederic returns to the front, Catherine's delivery, and Catherine's and her baby's deaths.

Although *A Farewell to Arms* takes place during World War I, the battle scenes in *Across the River and into the Trees* are recounted by Cantwell in the post-World War II period; compared with the events in *A Farewell to Arms*, the military activity in *Across the River and into the Trees* thus lacks immediacy and impact. Still, *Across the River and into the Trees* is home to many symbolic elements. The novel portrays some subjects in significant detail, creating various implications whose meanings develop as the narrative unfolds. Robert E. Fleming addresses the presence of these symbolic descriptions in *Across the River and into the Trees*: "It was not his [Hemingway's] chief intention to produce a realistic novel. Rather, he seems to have intended a more symbolic work than any he had written in the 1920s and 1930s" (129). Following Fleming's train of thought, *Across the River and into the Trees* is thus a more symbolic novel than *A Farewell to Arms*, which was written in 1929. Moreover, Renata, the heroine of *Across the River and into the Trees*, can also be considered a symbol. Given Renata's sudden appearance in the story and the disparity between Renata and Cantwell in terms of both age and social status, the reader has extremely few clues as to how the couple met and fell in love. According to Fleming, "Despite the fact that she is based on a real person (Adriana Ivancich), Renata lacks plausibility. She is perhaps better viewed as a symbolic character" (129).

Renata's depiction is more symbolic than Frederic's portrayal as a realistic, selfish character. Charles M. Oliver analyzes the reason for her symbolic metaphor, arguing, "Neither Renata nor Venice appear before the reader in time-present, but only as they are recalled by Cantwell in flashback" (144). Just as military actions in *Across the River and into the Trees* emerge less vividly

than those in *A Farewell to Arms*, Renata lacks a sense of reality because she appears only in Cantwell's memory. In addition, Renata is portrayed as an ideal young woman. Unlike Frederic in *A Farewell to Arms*, Renata devotes herself to Cantwell. Cantwell tells his war experiences to Renata, a behavior that Renata actively encourages. Making significant remarks repeatedly, Renata clarifies the reason she wants him to tell about that by asking, "Don't you see you need to tell me things to purge your bitterness?" and saying, "Tell me some more please and be just as bitter as you want" (*ART* 170). She asks Cantwell, "Don't you know I want you to die with the grace of a happy death?" (*ART* 170). In other words, she tries to elicit his abreaction by talking about bitter memories that Cantwell cannot relate anyone in hopes of assuring Cantwell safe passage into heaven. Her ideal, selfless personality is evident in many other situations. She is concerned about his medicine, for example, and asks, "May I give it to you?" (*ART* 65). She also worries about his health and says, "You see, I thought that you slept you might get rid of them, just being asleep" (*ART* 172). To grant his wishes, she asks him, "Is there anything you would like me to do?" (*ART* 173).

Next, the main characters' names are richly significant in interpreting their respective destinies and personalities, as well. Robert E. Gajdusek states that "Catherine's nickname, Cat, allies her with the mythical cat whose life proverbially ends on its ninth cycle, Catherine's own fate" (74). Waldhorn argues that "Renata, whose name means 'reborn,' embodies the beauty and innocence he [Cantwell] nostalgically yearns for" (184). Readers can also perceive Hemingway's intentions in his characters' names; as Russo explains, "Hemingway never gives her last name. Perhaps this could serve as a key to her generalized, ambiguous character: She is deliberately presented in vague terms" (163). According to Fleming, "Renata's name works with this pattern of symbolism, suggesting Cantwell's rebirth or perhaps his reunion with an earlier state of existence" (130).

Moreover, alcohol appears in many scenes of the two novels as a symbolic metaphor. Often a catalyst of hardship in the two war works, alcohol implies misfortune and leads to the main character's death at the end of each narrative. In *A Farewell to Arms*, for example, Frederic deliberately produces jaundice with alcoholism because he does not want to go back to the front. However,

Chief Nurse Miss Van Campen, who dislikes Frederic, eventually finds Frederic's bottles of booze. As a result of this revelation, he loses his leave for jaundice.

According to the medical community, drinking alcohol during pregnancy has a harmful effect on one's unborn baby. Catherine, however, drinks beer on her own doctor's advice to keep her baby small during pregnancy. She says, "Do you think I ought to drink another beer? The doctor said I was rather narrow in the hips and it's all for the best if we keep young Catherine small" (*AFA* 294). However, her baby ends up weighing five kilograms, and Catherine suffers from a protracted childbirth. After a difficult delivery, both Catherine and her baby lose their lives.

Cantwell, meanwhile, drinks alcohol in spite of his heart disease. Moreover, there are some scenes where he takes medicine with gin instead of water: "He knew how bad his anger was for him. So he took two of the pills and washed them down with a drink of Gordon's Gin from his flask since there was no water. He knew the gin was bad for him too" (*ART* 201). In the end, Cantwell dies from a series of three heart attacks.

The effects of the five senses also lend the symbols an important power, establishing a clarity that helps readers imagine the scenes more vividly. Hemingway describes his subjects in *Across the River and into the Trees* in great detail so that readers can feel their shapes, textures, and warmth. Moreover, major symbols give off resonant sensations. Writing on these effects, Stoltzfus says, "In *Across the River and into the Trees*, touch, feel, and sound . . . also generate happy images of remembrance" (23).

Renata "gives him [Cantwell] both her portrait and two large square emeralds," both of which are valuable and vintage (Russo 164). The descriptions of the three items also feature vivid details, which engender a sensory reading experience. According to Russo, the meaning of the emeralds is diverse: they not only serve as "her [Renata's] symbol" but also have individual attributes that symbolize different things in and of themselves, with "green being the symbolic color of Venice, jewels symbolizing oriental luxury, and squareness signifying the geometric, the nonnatural, and the uncanny" (164).

The two square emeralds have been handed down from generation to generation on the female side of Renata's family line. Renata thinks "they are only

something to wear like a dress from Paris” and gives them to Cantwell without hesitation (*ART* 73). Cantwell hesitates to take them and tries to return them to her several times, saying to Renata, “But I have to give them back you know” (*ART* 83) and “Please don’t forget to remind me to give back the stones” (*ART* 87). He is confused and thinks, “I have these damned stones. How could anyone do a thing like that?” (*ART* 118).

Depictions of the two square emeralds are full of tactile references. Explaining the reason she wants to give Cantwell the emeralds, Renata says, “I would like you to have the emeralds and you could keep them in your pocket like a lucky piece, and feel them if you were lonely” (*ART* 73). In addition to being good-luck charms, then, the emeralds are intended as objects of pleasure that might allow Cantwell to forget about his loneliness; furthermore, “Renata asks him to feel in his pocket for her two ‘stones’ (*ART* 103) which will remind him of her” (Russo 164). Renata is obsessive in her desire to make sure that Cantwell’s hands touch her emeralds. She demands, “Put your hand in your pocket to please me and feel them” (*ART* 74). He touches the jewels and answers, “They feel wonderful” (*ART* 74). When explaining how he wants to “trade in” his heart for a new one, Cantwell puts “his hand in his pocket” to touch the emeralds (*ART* 84). Finally, he puts the emeralds in an envelope and leaves it in the safe. Cantwell says to Renata, “Your stones are in the safe at the Gritti in your name” (*ART* 185), a remark that Renata corrects by saying, “Your stones” (*ART* 185).

Another source of “hand” sensations is Cantwell’s misshapen hand, marred by two injuries. His hand is split “around the center . . . and it still cracks open” (*ART* 96). Cantwell hates his hand and says, “It’s so damned ugly and I dislike looking at it” (*ART* 70). Sometimes, however, he thinks that he got his hand “honorably” (*ART* 96). Fantasizing that Cantwell’s hand is “the hand of Our Lord” (*ART* 60), Renata runs “her fingers very lightly over the scarred hand” (*ART* 61). As explained above, Renata is determined to have Cantwell’s hand feel the emeralds. She says, “It is your hand you touch them with” (*ART* 74). She asks him about the texture of the emeralds, saying, “Put your right hand, your real hand, in your pocket once and tell me how you feel” (*ART* 83). In the scene where Cantwell’s scarred hands caress the emeralds, Hemingway’s details abound: Cantwell puts “his right hand in his pocket” and feels

the emeralds “first with the tips of his fingers, and then with the insides of his fingers, and then with the palm of his hand; his split hand” (*ART* 94). Complementing this description of hand motion, the text also reveals the feel and temperature of the emeralds:

The Colonel took out the emeralds from his pocket, and looked at them, feeling them slide, cold and yet warm, as they take warmth, and as all good stones have warmth, from his bad hand into his good hand . . . The stones felt good. They were hard and warm against his flat, hard, old, and warm chest. (*ART* 117)

Hemingway renders the portrait of Renata so clearly that the reader can easily appreciate the visual sensations of the work. “It is very romantic,” Renata says. “My hair is twice as long as it has ever been and I look as though I were rising from the sea without the head wet. Actually, you rise from the sea with the hair very flat and coming to points at the end. It is almost the look of a very nearly dead rat” (*ART* 68–69). Unlike his reaction to the emeralds, Cantwell willingly accepts the portrait. Cantwell says, “The portrait is lovely to have” (*ART* 80) and, in an aside, “I can see the portrait. I’ll be damned if I’ll turn that in. I keep that” (*ART* 120). The emeralds, though, “are too valuable” for him to take “for a lucky stone” (*ART* 185). Although Renata asserts that “the portrait has value,” Cantwell rebuffs her, saying, “That is different” (*ART* 185). Russo argues that “her portrait, which she presents to Cantwell, is the most powerful representation in the novel of that transformation” (168). According to Russo, the portrait of Renata functions as a symbol of love. He asserts that “Cantwell’s final order to Jackson is to return the portrait of Renata and the shotguns, symbols of love and war, to their owners (Renata and Alvarito) through the Hotel Gritti” (175). Renata asks if the portrait resembles her; she longs to know “what it [the portrait] says, or does not say” of her (*ART* 103). The portrait is not completely the same as Renata herself; after all, it was painted two years prior, and her “hair is twice as long as it has ever been” (*ART* 68). Cantwell does not identify the portrait with the present, real Renata, either. Speaking to the portrait, Cantwell scoffs, “You are so God-damned beautiful you stink. Also you are jail-bait. Renata’s two years older now. You are under seventeen” (*ART* 127). Cantwell sees the portrait as a

conduit for Renata herself or only as a portrait, an artistic representation. "Daughter," Cantwell says, emoting to Renata "through" the portrait, ". . . Please know I love you and that I wish to be delicate and good. And please stay with me always now" (*ART* 117). At times, Cantwell blasts the portrait with wild words, while at others, he lays bare his true feelings before the piece: "Listen, Portrait . . . Do I have to hate the Krauts because we kill them? Do I have to hate them as soldiers and as human beings? It seems too easy a solution to me" (*ART* 125). Cantwell even calls the portrait "Miss Portrait," a confidante he can rely on for help. According to him, "Miss Portrait and I talked late and early and it made everything much easier" (*ART* 138).

Thus, the effects of symbols are present and powerful in both novels. Readers can imagine various scenes through symbols and foresee through them the plot of each story. As stated above, *A Farewell to Arms* reflects a tendency toward realism, while *Across the River and into the Trees* reads as a more symbolic work; in place of this sense of "reality," *Across the River and into the Trees* has more symbolic elements than *A Farewell to Arms*. The character of Renata, the heroine of *Across the River and into the Trees*, emerges in mysterious descriptions and assumes a symbolic figure, her words and deeds implying Cantwell's death. Moreover, the detailed descriptions of the symbols in *Across the River and into the Trees* prompt responses from all five senses.

### III. The theme of loss

This last chapter aims to examine the theme of loss in Hemingway's two war novels. Catherine and Cantwell, two handicapped main characters, die at the respective ends of the two novels. Although Hemingway portrayed loss in both novels, he wrote the scenes of his characters' demises in divergent ways.

The amazing amount of detail that colors the military actions and death scenes in *A Farewell to Arms* allows for a deeply sensory interpretation. The graphic descriptions of various military actions are highly visual and aural in nature:

a roar that started white and went red and on and on in a rushing wind . . . The ground was torn up and in front of my head there was a splintered beam of wood. In the jolt of my head I heard somebody crying . . . I heard the machine-guns and rifles firing across the river and

all along the river. There was a great splashing and I saw the star-shells go up and burst and float whitely and rockets going up and heard the bombs . . . and then I heard close to me some one saying "Mama Mia! Oh, mama Mia!" (AFA 54–55)

In addition, readers can perceive the freshness and temperature of wounds: "His legs were toward me and I saw in the dark and the light that they were both smashed above the knee. One leg was gone and the other was held by tendons and part of the trouser and the stump twitched and jerked as though it were not connected" (AFA 55). Moreover, the description of Frederic's legs makes his bleeding real: "My legs felt warm and wet and my shoes were wet and warm inside" (AFA 55).

On the other hand, all the military episodes in *Across the River and into the Trees* are told in even tones by Cantwell. Waldhorn also argues that "although *Across the River* is least among Hemingway's novels a work of action or suspense, he creates a sense of inevitability that informs the discrete, uneventful scenes and nearly unifies them" (179). The scenes of war in *Across the River and into the Trees* thus lack the impact of those in *A Farewell to Arms*.

Hemingway wrote the scene of Catherine's and her baby's death in great detail. Again, the author's depiction appeals to the reader's senses.

First, the gravity of the situation is described visually. Catherine looks "dead" because her face is "gray" (AFA 325). Exhausted, Catherine looks "all flat under the sheet" (AFA 328). Finally, her dead body looks like "a statue" (AFA 332). Frederic sees his baby's "little dark face and dark hand," but he does "not see him move" (AFA 325). Their stillborn baby boy "looks like a skinned rabbit with a puckered-up old-man's face" (AFA 326).

Auditory elements also play a role in forming the death scene. Catherine speaks "very softly" because it is "very hard for her to talk" (AFA 330–31). Frederic's inability to "hear him [his baby] cry" implies the baby's death (AFA 325).

*Across the River and into the Trees* contains nothing in the way of plot after Cantwell's death. Neither Renata's reaction to Cantwell's death nor the execution of his will (the return of Renata's portrait and the shotguns to their owners) appears. As a result, the text gives the reader no clue about what happens after Cantwell's death.

The characters in the novels also behave differently in the presence of death.

Although Catherine foresees her own death in the rain, she does not know that she is bound to lose her life in childbirth. Her sudden death catches her completely unprepared; had she actually been anticipating her death, she would not have gone shopping for her expected baby. Moreover, Frederic does not foresee her death, either. They escape to Switzerland to build a happy life. "I suppose if we really have this child," Catherine dreams, "we ought to get married" (*AFA* 293). She shows maternal concern about the welfare of the baby, saying, ". . . if I marry you I'll be an American and any time we're married under American law the child is legitimate" (*AFA* 294).

Standing face to face with Catherine's imminent death, Frederic and Catherine get confused and lose their presence of mind. Frederic starts to cry at the sight of the enfeebled Catherine. When he tries to take her hand, Catherine says, "Don't touch me" (*AFA* 330). As death approaches, Catherine agonizes, "I'm going to die . . . I hate it . . . I'm not afraid. I just hate it" (*AFA* 330). Her revelation on her deathbed again implies that she did not consider death a real possibility. "I meant to write you a letter to have if anything happened," she says, "but I didn't do it" (*AFA* 330).

Meanwhile, Cantwell's death is completely aware of his impending, inevitable death. Due to dizziness, twinges, and heart attacks, Cantwell stands continuously on the precipice of a certain death. Renata also knows he will die. Death is always on his mind, and he behaves on the condition that he will die. He asks Alvarito to give his love to Renata, for example, and makes other requests: "In case of any unforeseen contingencies would you ask her to have the portrait picked up at the Gritti?" (*ART* 217). Cantwell leaves his will with his driver, Jackson, before his three heart attacks strike the fatal blow.

The moment of his death stirs lucid, composed regrets, as Cantwell thinks, "I forgot to give Bobby the sausage. There was no time to write Renata a note" (*ART* 218). He gives orders to Jackson with dignity in the presence of death, maintaining his composure until his last moment. He tells Jackson about General Thomas J. Jackson's last words, "Let us cross over the river and rest under the shade of the trees," which also signify Cantwell's death (*ART* 219). Just before his final breath, Cantwell moves to the back seat of the car. In Gajdusek's eyes, "Colonel Cantwell, possessor of the unchanging portrait of

Renata, accepts the back seat of his automobile as the place of his death, so that he dies while riding on wheels" (83).

The descriptions of war and death are thus integral components of the "loss" theme present in the two works. *A Farewell to Arms* takes an explicit, detail-oriented eye to its death scenes, while *Across the River and into the Trees* adopts a more detached perspective. Hemingway's portrayal of Catherine's and her baby's sudden deaths is so clear and vivid that the reader essentially feels part of the scene, immersed in a sensory experience. In *Across the River and into the Trees*, Hemingway chooses to illuminate Cantwell's way of life as the character draws his last breaths. Cantwell, always conscious of death, exhibits planned, thought-out behavior, preserving his dignity until the very end.

### Conclusion

As mentioned above, Hemingway addressed the theme of loss in both of his war novels but mapped his thematic explorations in decidedly different ways.

Although he did not explicitly craft his war novels as "antiwar" works, the couples in both narratives experience separation upon a partner's death. Hemingway filled the novels with sinister atmospheres and symbolism that enable the readers to anticipate the characters' later misfortunes.

In *A Farewell to Arms*, a cruel fate befalls Frederic and Catherine, who abandon their duties and escape to Switzerland to secure their own happiness. The more they pursue their happiness, ironically, the more troubling their situation turns. Here, Hemingway actively creates a sinister atmosphere and introduces several symbols to shape their tragedy.

Love and death are forces in Hemingway's two war novels set in Italy, but their respective styles differ. *Across the River and into the Trees* is seen as more symbolic than *A Farewell to Arms*, which was published in 1929. The reputation of *Across the River and into the Trees* has been largely unfavorable ever since its publication, but some scholars have regarded the book as a significantly symbolic work.

Because the scenes of military action and the deaths of Catherine and her baby in *A Farewell to Arms* are meticulously drawn from an observer's standpoint, readers can feel as if they are actually "on the scene."

On the other hand, Cantwell is the reader's only source for descriptive accounts of military activity in *Across the River and into the Trees*. Events after Cantwell's death are absent from the narrative, as well. While these elements warrant little or no description within the narrative, the depictions of the emeralds and Renata's portrait, given to Cantwell as gifts, are rich in detail. These descriptions give readers a sense of touch and sight.

In *Across the River and into the Trees*, Hemingway wrote about symbols like the emeralds and Renata's portrait more meticulously than events like military actions and Cantwell's death. This tendency helps make *Across the River and into the Trees* more symbolic than *A Farewell to Arms*.

Characters' feelings and behavior at the moment of their partners' deaths expose another difference between the two novels. Catherine's death comes so suddenly that characters are upset and confused. For Cantwell, however, death is an inevitability; his dignity and presence of mind remain entirely intact.

By analyzing and contrasting Hemingway's two war novels from the viewpoints of feelings, one can better grasp the nature of the divergent styles and aims that Hemingway embraced in writing the works.

#### Notes

- 1 *A Farewell to Arms* is abbreviated *AFA* in this paper.
- 2 *Across the River and into the Trees* is abbreviated *ART* in this paper.

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