

A Farewell to Arms

Compare and contrast three themes present throughout the story of A Farewell to Arms.

A Farewell to Arms is a novel written in 1929 by Ernest Hemingway. The story takes place in Italy, during the First World War, and follows a person by the name of Frederic Henry, who is a Lieutenant in the ambulance corps of the Italian army. The story focuses on Henry's time as a Lieutenant in the army and his relationship with a woman by the name of Catherine Barkley. Three overall themes glow through the story, and this essay will analyze each theme separately, and then connect and contrast the themes to discover the significance of each theme to the others. The three themes are love, war, and loyalty, and the essay will analyze these solely in terms of the characters of the novel.

Henry first meets Catherine after Rinaldi tells him that he loves her, and Henry, therefore, follows Rinaldi over to Catherine to support him. However, Henry and Catherine strike a conversation, and by the end of that conversation, it is clear to Rinaldi that Catherine prefers Henry. Although Henry knows that Catherine prefers him, he does not truly reflect on this and in effect on Rinaldi, as Henry has no real experience with love, and at this point, his understanding of love is purely physical. The second time that Henry and Catherine meet, they become a bit closer and Henry kisses Catherine. Catherine even asks Henry if he actually loves her, and he boldly lies that he does. Catherine knows that Henry lied to her; however, she was strangely attracted to Henry, and while the novel of A Farewell to Arms is not as complicated as other books, this situation does display one of the strange things about love. This is also why Catherine says "We're going to have a strange life." (Hemingway, 25) Catherine understands other aspects of love than just the physical aspects as she was engaged to someone before she met Henry, but her fiancé had died. Catherine has experienced the emotional aspect of love, and she is afraid of being too close with Henry due to her previous experience with love.

However, after the bombs wounds Henry, he slowly begins to realize other aspects of love than just the physical aspect. While laying in his hospital bed, his mind cannot stay focused long on other things than Catherine. He begins to understand the emotional aspect of love. As he begins truly to love her, Catherine comes to his hospital room, and they make love for the first time. Ironically, they make love shortly after Henry discovers that he loves Catherine, and not when their relationship was purely physical from Henry's part. After this occurrence, their love begins to escalate, and they begin to spend hours and hours together each day. Since Henry is wounded, he has all the time in the world to be with Catherine; however, the short times that he is not with her, he still misses her. This is an indication of true love, and it is an interesting thing that this is Henry's first authentic experience with love, but not