

A Comparative Analysis of the Themes of 'War', 'Love', and 'Illusion' in Postmodern Age in *A Farewell to Arms* and *Eye of the Needle*

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Abstract

The study attempts to explore and analyse the themes of 'love', 'war' and 'illusion' in the two novels written by two different authors. One is *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) written by Ernest Hemingway and the other is *Eye of the Needle* (2015) written by Ken Follet. Hemingway and Follet both are American novelists who are known for their fondness for writing on the theme of war. Hemingway wrote many novels using the backdrop of the First World War whereas Ken Follet's *Eye of the Needle* is authored in the backdrop of the Second World War. Hemingway is one of the representative of modern age writers, whereas Ken Follet is one of the writers of postmodern age. It has been observed that both writers while writing on the theme of war in the chosen novels involve, consciously or unconsciously, two sub-themes of 'love' and 'illusion' in their fiction. The research analyses that what are the differences and the similarities between these writers' approach towards the said themes. This paper aims at interpreting these themes in the context of postmodernists' scholarship while comparing and contrasting the treatment, which both writers have given to the themes of war, love, and illusion.

Keywords: War, Love, Illusion, Postmodern, Comparison, Contrast.

1. Introduction

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) is an American writer who emerged on the literary scene of the modernist period in Paris during the 1920s and gained popularity as a famous author of the twentieth century. Hemingway is known for his minimalist style of writing, often detached emotionally (Hallet, 1996). Hemingway believes in conveying mental states through external details (Berman, 2002). He belongs to the period when World War I had imprinted its influence on the mind of the modern man. After-effects of war had left masses dejected, disillusioned, and wrestling with the phenomenon of nothingness. Hemingway utilizes the themes of love and illusion in the backdrop of World War I. The novel shows how war can affect the personal lives and psyche of those who are involved in it in one way or the other.

Kenneth Martin Follett (1949) is a Welsh author who is famous for writing thrillers and historical narratives. A number of his books have been able to get high ranking as bestseller books. Follet is an author of the postmodern age. His novel *Eye of the Needle* can exhibit the plight of the postmodern man who is torn between his professional duty and the instinctive desire to love and to be loved. A detailed analysis of the novel written in the backdrop of World War II is an endeavour to highlight the themes of war and love and subsequent disillusionment

present in the mind of postmodern man.

The term postmodernism is a debatable one, specifically in literary theory (Bordo, 1992). The terms postmodern and postmodernism have been defined and elaborated from multiple perspective. For readers' convenience, its reception can be categorized in three distinct ways. First, it can refer to an era that starts right after the end of World War I, and another group of scholars' claims that it started around the 1970s. Second, it refers to a cluster of philosophical theories that emerged in the 1960s. Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, and Jean Francis Lyotard are among the prominent postmodern poststructuralist thinkers (Sarup, 1993). Then in the 1970s and 1960s, a good number of analyses can be found that involve language and symbolic systems. Finally, people use the term postmodernism to a complete body of works embodying the ideas of postmodern thinkers.

This research is concerned with the first type of understanding of the term postmodernism i.e. the period that starts right after World War II. The objective of the article is to explore that how the phenomenon of 'war' is instrumental in shaping and reshaping the lives of the protagonists in both novels; where 'love' and subsequent 'illusion' are the sub-themes in both narratives. The research suggests that war is the key factor in constituting the subjectivity of the main characters. The research's significance lies in the fact that in past years, there has been no comparative study made on the two chosen texts, specifically keeping the themes of the novels in consideration. The article seeks to establish a relationship among the three themes of war, love, and illusion in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *Eye of the Needle* (2015). Moreover, it aims at exploring that what differences and/or similarities are (if any) in treatment of the said themes in modern and postmodern period.

2. Literature Review

Yousef (2017) describes three basic principles of the two literary movements: modernism and postmodernism. He further adds metamodernism and draws a connection among them three. These three concepts play a vital role in constituting the critical thought in twentieth and twenty first century. These philosophical and literary notions are found in multiple disciplines for instance, literature, art, culture architecture, and social sciences. Modernism as a literary and philosophical movement emerged around the nineteenth century and saw its rise in the twentieth century. Modernism in its literary representation can be found in works of W. B. Yeats, Joseph Conrad, Henry James, A. E. Houseman, and others. Virginia Woolf and T.S Eliot are among two most prominent authors. Eliot's "Tradition and Individual Talent" (1919) and Woolf's "Modern Fiction" are the two significant texts which provide a clear break of modern literature from the literature of Victorians and Romantics.

Postmodernists do not believe in the existence of the objectivity of knowledge. According to them there are no universal truths present in the world and there are many irrational things prevalent in the world. Hatch (2018) raised question on the rationality of modernism and its basic ways of thinking. Postmodern authors denied any relationship between past and present. Postmodernists' works inherently manifest inchoate and facile thoughts, lacking base with digressing attitude from the focal point. Postmodernism does not adhere to any system of ideas and philosophy rather demonstrates in flowery words with garish ideas, and sometimes it seems a wanton intellectual expedition. Fragmentation in postmodernist literature is supposed to evince essence of social patterns and societal segregation, but its writers often abandon their works at fickle and abstract thoughts, speaking no meaning to a reader, let alone reaching to a

conclusion. Their literary endeavours are mere mishmash of mockery and travesty, and lampooning in mindless sarcasm while disregarding norms and limitations of various genres.

The postmodern texts cloak the readers' mind in abstruse verbosity where art extends no meaning and history narrates no truth; and language contorts rather to inform reality. This skepticism of postmodernism led to incongruent, fragmented, and self-reflexive stories, which were seemingly intellectual hallmark but dictated the reader to slippery road of circumlocution and tautology where they have no footing to grasp the crux of text. Their stylistic techniques contain use of metafiction, magical realism, faction, intersexuality, and ranging from minimalist reductionism to readers' involvement and suggestions as well. Samuel Beckett, Kurt Vonnegut, Jorge Luis Borges, John Barth, Vladimir Nabokov, Jane Rhys, Don DeLillo, Salman Rushdie, Thomas Pynchon and, and many others are known figures whose works surrounded in such fashion. Postmodernism negates the rationality and logic of modernism, and disapproves scientific reasoning to comprehend human conditions and social relations (Felski, 2009). Human history from time immemorial is replete with diverse distressing and agonizing experiences. Such experiences lead to issues, pondered by writers and that can be interpreted while reading the literary works. For instance, Ernest Hemingway's fictional work describes horrific war experience of protagonists who is victimized and trashed while enduring fatal war episodes. This theme has been conspicuously witnessed in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Where the protagonist endured such fatal series of traumatization, be that was as an ambulance driver or a lover, all led to traumatic experience. Being a traumatic protagonist, his memories are inexorably impregnated with those disquieting moments and traumas, and notwithstanding he wants to forget those horrible events; they get more ingrained while striving to forget them.

According to Pokhran (2013), Simone de Beauvoir, an existential feminist, is a post-war voice, who although takes Catherine Barkley an anti-mythic character and laud Hemingway for considering women equal to man in honour to elevate a female without mystery. However, Barlowe-Kayes (1993) reveal unremitting remonstrance of Hemingway's objectification of women and alienating them to promote men's masochistic quality. He puts forward contrary and brief aspect that how Hemingway played down his feminine characters as women are sexual temptation, muses, inspiration and release from sexual tension; and women nurture, create conditions which help men to accomplish in decision making, along with solvers of domestic problems. Even when Hemingway appreciates women, regard them in periphery and consider them objects for domestic use and nurturing, and attribute no power to them. Barlowe-Kayes maintain that Hemingway takes women as an indisputable commodity. Presenting women mere prostitutes for Italian officer and soldiers in Gorizia unambiguously proves Hemingway's chauvinistic characteristic.

Love, war, and illusion are philosophical concepts, which are interlinked. Since the creation of universe, humanity is victim of love and war (Berlin, 2013). Sometimes it seems that love and war are two sides of same coin, where there is love there is war. However, the phenomenon of love and war has been re-shaped in different cycles of history. In olden times, they were treated as sacred concepts but in postmodern times, modes of war and love have been changed along with the changing environment of the societies. Wars have been fought for the economic interests rather than for emotional satisfaction (Lebow, 2010). Enmity and friendship are based upon interests, the countries become enemies for their interests, and this enmity also turns into friendship for the specific interests. There will be no wrong to say that enmity and friendship change along with changing interests. The same is the concept of war and love in post-modern societies. The modes of wars and warriors have been changed in the contemporary times.

Nassbaum (2002) maintains that love is a diversified concept, which can be used in different situations. Love for motherland and love between the individuals have quite different interpretations from each other. Love for country sometimes takes shape of war when natives become ready to fight for the sake of their countries. They prioritize their land over life. This attitude has been seen more in developing countries as compared to the developed ones. On the other hand, the developed nations are very much inclined towards economic and cultural wars. They have changed the modes of wars.

Love between individuals has also changed the colours in different period, as the societies have been transformed in postmodern (Brooten, 1996). The capitalistic thinking has effected spiritual love. There will be no wrong to say that it has been transformed for natural to nurture. In postmodern age, true love of olden times as mythical one. Moreover, it has been transformed from spiritual to physical (Amoroso, 2016). Globalization has not only effected the themes of love but also created illusion in the minds of the human being (Atran & Medin, 2008). Even the concepts of true and false, right and wrong, good and bad and civilized and uncivilized are intermingled with each other. In postmodern society, reality has become relative; evil for one is good for the other.

3. Research Methodology

The research is purely qualitative. It is descriptive cum analytical in nature. In this research paper, the interpretation has been used a methodology for textual analysis. The article is delimited as only two texts are chosen written by two different authors. The data has been collected from various articles published in journals, concerned books, and electronic resources. The theoretical framework chosen is the reader-response theory. The chosen theory gives importance to the response of the reader while reading the text. According to the reader-response, it is the reader who gives real existence to a work (Davis & Womack, 2002). Reader response theory claims that a reader plays a crucial role in determining the literary meaning of the text. When reader's response merges with the text, it gives birth to new meanings. How a reader sees a particular text, depends largely on his/her personal experience. The interaction between a reader and text is instrumental in reshaping the ideas in quite a new fashion (Spirovska, 2019). The researchers aimed at interpreting the text from their personal observation and aesthetic response given to the text.

Different chunks related to love; war and illusion have been traced from the two literary texts. The researchers have analyzed and interpreted the texts in the light of the above-mentioned theory. Interpretations of the texts have provided the insight of the authors with reference to love, war, and illusion. Moreover, comparative research methods have been used to draw a comparison between the *Eye of the Needle* (2015) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). The similarities and difference have been judged through comparative study.

4. Discussion

A Farewell to Arms (1929) is Hemingway's third novel, which was published in 1929. The novel provides an extended description of the dilemma of existential crisis (Lewis, 2014). Existentialism is a philosophical and literary movement that emerged on literary scene in nineteenth century and saw its peak in twentieth century. Existentialists believe that human beings live in an irrational world but they take rational decision (Kaufmann, 2016). The notion

is basically an emphasis on the claim that human beings define their own meanings in life. Among other significant names like F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, and E. E. Cumming, Hemingway is one of the representatives of the "Lost Generation", a group of American authors who were literarily reputed during World War I (Nozen, 2018). They earned this reputation in the 1920s. In general, the term, "Lost Generation" can also be used for the post WWI generation. Henry the protagonist well establishes the phenomenon of disillusionment in his character. He, although, was fighting for the Italian army, has no associations attached to this war.

The title, *A Farewell to Arms* has been taken from George Peele's poem *A Farewell to Arms* which peel wrote in the 16th century (Hemingway, 2012). Interpretation of the title brings the double meaning of the word "arms". One meaning refers to weapons while another meaning refers to the limb of the human body. The title, in this way, is suggestive of the fact that Hemingway wants to establish a connection between the themes of war and love in his novel.

The novel starts with the description of war and draws the reader's attention towards the disaster which is caused by world war I. Hemingway describes people's indifferent attitude towards the ugliness of it. "Troops went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees." (3). Further, he describes the diseases and death with an iron undertone, "with the rain came to cholera. But it was checked and in the end, only seven thousand died of it in the army" (4). Wars bring death and destruction with it and leave indelible marks on the lives of the people who are involved in it. Those who are fighting in the war, sometimes suffer more than those who are the victim of it. Fredrick Henry, the protagonist the story is one such character who apparently is a part of the Italian army but being an American citizen, he never feels a sense of belonging with the war. On one occasion he says, "I knew I would not be killed. Not in this war. It did not have anything to do with me." (39). Later he wished the warriors best of luck, saying that it was not his "show". He uses the word "bloody train" for war events. Large-scale destruction caused due to wars desensitizes people. On one occasion, Henry very comfortably depicts a dying man whose face is smudged with running blood on it. The drops fell very slowly, as they fell from an icicle after the sun has gone." (66).

The rejection of war can be seen in other important characters of the novel as well. Rinaldi, Henry's friend, admits and says that war is killing him and he feels very depressed due to it. Henry wants to bid farewell to war and when he finds himself confronted with another Italian soldier, he deliberately jumps into the river to get rid of war.

The theme of 'love' is another significant theme in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Hemingway with much dexterity has blended it with the theme of 'war'. The love affair between Henry and a nurse Catherine Berkeley flourishes in the backdrop of world war I. Miss Berkeley like Henry is disillusioned as she had already lost her fiancée during the war. Love during the war is a risky task. Uncertainty prevails in every moment during this condition. Since love knows no restrictions, therefore they both start approaching towards without caring for the consequences. Before meeting Berkeley, Henry 's views about girls and love are quite naïve. Once he meets her and is indulged in an affair, he is a different man. The disillusionment and a sense of alienation which war has inculcated in his personality, has altered his views about the notion of love. However, it is the richness of the subtle experience he had in Berkeley's company, which has transformed his personality. Berkeley also has a different attitude towards the notion of love in the beginning. She even after establishing a physical relationship with Henry is illusive about the true nature of it. She ascribes it just as physicality that is shown in her words she utters and after spending intimate moments with Henry, saying that he needs not to pretend

that he is in love, pure and sublime. Towards the end of the novel when he becomes aware that she would die, he prays for the first time that "I'll do anything for you if you won't let her die" (353). He bid a deliberate adieu to war, to a life which was charged by arms and ammunitions, but fate made him bid farewell to the arms of his beloved Catherine when she died in childbirth.

Two distinct themes of war and love run seamlessly throughout the famous novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). The title itself is suggestive of these two vibrant themes. Love yields to no barriers. It can act as a source of solace and fulfillment during the war. Both the themes are introduced by the author in the first few chapters of Book I. Book I begins with the introduction of a lull in the war. The first four chapters create a scene of horrors of war whereas chapter five triggers the theme of love when Rinaldi promises Lieutenant Henry to introduce him to Barkley. The meeting begins with an amorous relationship that culminates in true love later on. Both themes are blended scrupulously by Henry's attitude of indifference towards love and towards war in the beginning but later on, he gets involved in both. A close perusal of the plot of the novel reveals the simultaneous progress of both themes. Sometimes one theme dominates the scene but both run together. For instance, in Book I, both the themes have been introduced; by the end of Book I Catherine falls in love with Henry but he is more engaged with affairs of war and after being wounded he is shifted to the hospital and the couple gets united.

There is a prevalence of the theme of love in Book II but war does not recede completely in the background. In Book III, the reader finds disillusioned soldiers who are frightened by war, and see Henry saying farewell to war. It is now that he has fully realized his position in the war. He knows that this war does not belong to him and now he takes courage to abandon it at any cost. Miss Berkeley's attitude towards 'love' is slightly altered. She could not completely come out of disillusionment after her fiancé's death and love is not his priority in life anymore. Then we see Book IV covers the theme of 'love' and find the two lovers reunited. At the same time, the fear of war overshadows their intimate life. They escape to Switzerland and are overwhelmed due to fear of being caught. Henry's thoughts about his friends and accounts of war take on a secondary position in Book V. Love theme occupies a major portion in Book V. Hemmingway has blended both themes with skill. Hemmingway's artistic craftsmanship is also manifested in his choice of the title of the novel, which aptly sheds light on both themes. The risk of death and separation is at zenith in every passing moment; still love knows no bars and restrictions. Love can be a source of contentment as it can provide joyful moments during stressful times and can take away from the fear of harsh realities of life during the war.

The eye of the needle is a maxim used as a metaphor to refer to the narrow opening. In Judaism and Christianity, it is quoted "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Moreman, 2017). In a literary sense, it can be ascribed to perform a difficult job. The protagonist of the novel *Eye of the Needle* is depicted as a duty-bound German spy who performs a risky task during WWII. He is appointed on the duty of providing sensitive information to Germans to win the war. *Eye of the Needle* (2015) is the fictionalization of the real war events. It describes the MI5's attempts to arrest Henry Faber, whose nickname is "The Needle." The novel is significant in this way as it uses real events of WWII. The names of places and actual events are fusing the fact with fiction in an effective manner. The story intertwines the elements of illusion, war, and love in the wartime depicting unrivaled deception during the war period. A foreword to the novel describes a historical view and describes Operation Fortitude which was a counterintelligence amplification by the allied forces to misguide the Germans about the site of D-Day's attack. Allies had structured the illusion in the form of FUSAG, First United States Army Group. "There was no army, of course. The ships

were rubber-and-timber fakes, the barracks no more real than a movie set; Patton did not have a single man under his command; the radio signals were meaningless; the spies were double agents" (Follet, 2015). The group used props to draw Germans' attention to Calais to keep them away from Normandy, which was the actual point of attack.

Ken Follet in his narrative has structured the illusive elements in the plot to portray the deceptive nature of the wartime. The illusion is present not only in the structure of the plot but also in the attitude of the protagonists, Faber, and Lucy. The reader observes the development of an intimate relationship between the two. Faber, in the novel, is depicted as a patriotic and loyal spy who is working for Germany. He is ready to discard anything or any person who can become a hindrance in the way of his duty. At the beginning of the novel, it is seen that he killed Mrs. Gardner on the spur of the moment without even thinking for a moment. Love was not an option for him. He always preferred his duty to love. However, as the story moves forward, we see him involved in a serious relationship with Lucy, the wife of David. It is now that the reader observes a new side of his personality. His intimacy grows more and more with Lucy and he leaves behind his duty of a spy. Lucy, on the other hand, is shown as a faithful and loving wife but after the car accident of her husband, she is depressed and disillusioned as he (David) is unable to spend a normal life with Lucy. Soon, Lucy falls for Faber and they start an intimate relationship. One day, David goes through Faber's possessions and finds fake photos of the FUSAG site. It is now when Faber decides to kill David. When Lucy discovers that Faber is the murderer of her husband, she develops antagonism in her heart for Faber. She destroys the whole power system in the cottage managed by Faber. He could not believe that Lucy can take courage to kill him. "Don't be silly, Lucy," he said mildly. "How could you hurt me? After all the things, we have done together. Haven't we loved each other, a little...?" (Follet, 2015). He was powerful enough to kill Lucy but then he realized that he is in love and cannot kill her.

Eye of the Needle (2015) is a spy novel but also illuminates the fact that we never know that who loses and who wins, as it does not always depend on that who is powerful rather it's a matter of subjective priorities in life. Using the background of World War II, Follet suggests that such a great event can come down to the most basic accident in human beings' life that is love. The plight of postmodern, post-war man is that he is doomed to the absurdity of life.

4.1. A Postmodernist Stance on the Themes of War and Love

Analyzing any text from a postmodern perspective remains incomplete if it is not associated with modernists' stance on the subject. It has always been a debatable concern that whether postmodernism is an extension of modernism or it is a deviation from it. The term 'Modernism' is significant for its emphasis on a feeling of disillusionment about post-war man's life. Modernist writers such as Hemingway had seen the horrors of war, and their works reflected a sense that life was not going to live up to its promise. They started believing that all such ideas like faith and moralities were no truer. Individualism and absurdity are the two important attributes of modernist literature. The First World War and the Second World War had a profound effect on the literary works produced during those times. Deaths on a large scale had made the world an absurd place to live.

The postmodernism as a cultural movement emerged on the literary scene of the world after the Second World War the sensibility of war has informed much of the works written in the postmodern era as well. Postmodern literature is known for its reliance on the techniques of

unreliable narration, fragmentation, and paradox. Postmodernism is often seen as a reaction towards the modernists' approach to literature. However, a close reading of postmodernist literature and theory can illuminate some similarities related to the philosophy of subjectivity. Both are representative of the break from the realism that flourished in the 19th century. Both believe in exploring individualism, subjectivity, and an emphasis on the inner state of mind.

The two chosen novels for the textual analysis represented the postmodern disillusionment which are blended with the themes of war and love. War is the reason for disillusionment in both novels. The protagonists in both narratives show a quite indifferent attitude towards war. Although they are duty-bound, yet they have the desire of spending a normal life like others. Henry has quite changed a person after meeting Catherine and Faber is not the same after meeting Lucy. Love has changed the lives of both. They started preferring love life to their professional duties. Contemporary critics in the century belonging to the schools of psychoanalysis, poststructuralist, postmodernism, reject human nature as a distinct phenomenon and define human nature as a product of only culture and convention (Dunn, 1998). "For poststructuralists and postmodernists, the subject is a fragmented being who has no essential core of identity and is to be regarded as a process in a continual state (Dunn, 1998). The change in the character of Faber and Henry shows that their subjectivity is relying on their surroundings i.e. the war situation. War is the deciding factor that would be loved and how would be loved.

5. Conclusion

The two novels *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *Eye of the Needle* (2015) when viewed from modernist and postmodernist viewpoints establish the fact that postmodern subject is a victim of disillusionment. The post-war era had affected the psychological state of a person to the extent that he /she feels crippled sometimes when it comes to maintaining a balance between their professional duties and their personal lives. All the four main characters in both novels are disillusioned and subsequently perplexed while choosing among different options provided to them. Absurdity and meaninglessness in life of modern man is the result of technological progress as well. Due to technological progress, modern/postmodern man is more in touch with machines rather than human beings. The subsequent distance from each other has given birth to a void in human personalities. Wars have become more technologically advanced where killing humanity is not a difficult task. The three themes discussed in the article closely related to each other in the two chosen narratives. The two novelists Hemingway and Follet have depicted this human situation in their distinct style while highlighting the notions of war and love as a recurrent theme. In addition, they have maintained that war and love both bring disillusionment to human life. It is up to the individual how he/she decides to choose the appropriate response. War, love and the notion of illusion are closely related to each other in both the novels. For Henry, the protagonist in *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), is deeply affected by the war. He is bound to be a part of it. In the backdrop of war, his ideas about the phenomenon of love are in constant flux. He re-shapes his amorous ideas after meeting Catherine Berkely. Before that, he was in an illusion about the true nature of love. Similarly, Faber, the protagonist *Eye of Needle* (2015), develops his love life after meeting Lucy. Before that, he was a devoted spy for whom war was more important than anything else in his life was. To conclude, it is said that both novels with certain similarities and differences discussed in the article, take the three themes together in an effective way.

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