

## Catherine Barkley: Character Analysis=A Farewell to Arms=

Ernest Hemingway, one of the greatest novelists of modern times, created such gems of English literature and produced such unforgettable and marvelous characters as can never be forsaken or overlooked. In *A Farewell to Arms*, there are two important and extraordinary characters; one of them, undoubtedly, is Catherine Barkley.

It seems to be worthwhile to mention that she is a flat character and she has pre-conceived notions about life, death, love and war. She is confident and excites sympathy and tender feelings by her gentle and exemplary behavior. She is a beautiful and tall woman and has a comely figure.

When Catherine sees Henry for the first time, the shadow of death hangs over their meeting--her fiancé has been blown "all to bits" in the war of Somme. In her conversation with Henry, she laments that she didn't marry her fiancé before he died. She says that they were engaged for "eight years," and that they "grew up together."

Upon her meeting with Henry, Catherine relies upon the grand illusion of love and seduction for comfort. Catherine seeks solace for the death of her fiancé while Henry is doing anything to distance himself from the war. Catherine reminds Henry several times that their courtship is a game. But even at the stage of flirtation and mere sensuality, we may easily perceive that Catherine's love is deeper than that of Henry.

Catherine is extremely romantic, she loves being in love. She's also desperately lonely when she meets him. Thus she merges her own identity into Henry's. What she really craves for, is to be "one" with him:

"There isn't any me. I'm you. Don't make up a separate me."

Catherine's love is so intense that it becomes her religion:

"You're my religion. You're all I've got", she tells Henry.

She totally worships Frederic like a god and will do anything to get him. And she doesn't fall apart without him when they are separated, but just keeps on trucking and hoping. She doesn't need Frederic for anything but love. She says to Henry that they are married to each other and must not bother about formal marriage. On her pregnancy she assures Henry as:

"I'll try and not make trouble for you. I know I've made trouble now. But haven't I always been a good girl until now?"

She is not worried at all about the illegitimate child being nourished in her womb. Rather she worries about Henry becoming bored with her, and repeatedly talks about changing her hairstyle to maintain his interest; she worries about gaining weight from the pregnancy and even apologizes to Henry for being in pain during her difficult labour.

Significantly, one cannot doubt Catherine's bravery and stoicism as she perishes; in stoicism and bravery, she matches if not exceeds Henry. She handles with grace their midnight flight from Italy, never succumbing to fear or even irritability. Even at the beginning of the novel, when Henry is tempted to dismiss her as "a little crazy", Catherine is fully aware of the game which they are playing. "You don't have to pretend to love me... You see I'm not mad."

She has an admirable personal strength and firmness of conviction which carries her through each challenging situation with fortitude. She even handles her own death with courage, rejecting the presence of a priest and asking simply that Henry stay with her. Hemingway ingeniously introduces the symbolic significance of the rain into the narrative. Rain is important to the novel, and especially to Catherine. The rain almost always heralds destruction and death; it impinges upon whatever momentary happiness Henry and Catherine have and turns it into muddy misery. Catherine is very fearful of the rain and expresses her inner fear in these words:

"I'm afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it"

She's afraid that the rain is a portent of the death of any love she might find. In the 1970s and 80s, feminist critic Fetterly argued that the character of Catherine in *A Farewell to Arms* proves that Ernest Hemingway was a misogynist i.e he was against women. Fetterly's claim is that Catherine's death at the end of the novel proves that Hemingway thought that "the only good woman is a dead woman."

Later female critics, most notably, Spanier, however, argued the opposite – that Catherine helps prove that Hemingway loved women and understood them deeply. Spanier argues that Catherine is the protagonist of the novel and that her willingness to love Frederic entirely is heroic.

Even Catherine's death during childbirth is meant to parallel the deaths of the soldiers in battle. Like the soldiers who stood brave in the face of battle, Catherine stood brave in the face of a battle with her own body.

In a nut-shell, Hemingway, through the character of Catherine Barkley, introduces us to an outstanding and extraordinary brave woman. She possesses positive attitude and faces difficulties of life with a smiling face. She brings about revolutionary changes in his character. Thus Hemingway uses Catherine as a foil to Henry and an index of his maturation. She is a loving, dedicated woman whose desire and capacity for a redemptive, otherworldly love makes her the inevitable victim of the tragedy.