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ARMS AND THE MAN AND A FAREWELL TO ARMS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* exhibits a shift in focus towards the critique of societal conventions and the challenge of gender roles. The theatrical work scrutinises the incongruity between semblance and actuality within the context of the Victorian era. The utilisation of war as a literary device in the play serves as a means of instigating an in-depth examination of wider socio-cultural themes. *Arms and the Man* presents a departure from conventional beliefs about sacrifice by exposing its shallowness and the concealed incentives that underlie it. The author Shaw employs the literary device of satire to bring to light the prevalent hypocrisy and idealised notions surrounding the act of sacrifice. Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* portrays a verisimilar and unvarnished portrayal of the dehumanising consequences of warfare on the characters. The author's narrative accentuates the ramifications of war on both the physical and psychological well-being of the characters. The utilisation of rain as a symbol in *A Farewell to Arms* conveys the ominous and capricious nature of warfare, thereby evoking a melancholic and fatalistic atmosphere. The work in question exhibits a profound exploration of the themes of loss, mortality, and the inescapable tragedy that pervades the lives of its characters. The character of the chocolate cream soldier in George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* serves to subvert conventional notions of heroism. The text illustrates the theme of appearance versus reality, while simultaneously employing satire to critique the idealisation of war and heroism.

Keywords: Drama of ideas, symbolism, thesis drama

George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* and Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* are two notable literary works that explore the themes of war and its aftermath. The two novels under consideration bear the imprint of the political and socio-cultural milieu of their respective epochs. However, they evince marked divergences with

respect to the particular influences at play and the manner in which these influences inform the plotlines.

The confluence of World War I and the First Balkan War is a topic of great interest among scholars of modern European history. The complex

interplay of political, economic and social factors that led to the outbreak of these two conflicts and their subsequent impact on the region and the world at large have been the subject of extensive research and analysis. The events surrounding these wars continue to be a rich area of inquiry for those seeking to understand the dynamics of international relations and the complexities of modern warfare. Hemingway's direct involvement in the conflict as an ambulance driver is reflected in the novel's themes and characters. According to Benson (112), the novel portrays the characters' disillusionment, trauma, and loss of identity in the midst of the war's chaos and destruction. The textual representation of the war exhibits a realistic approach that accentuates the individual's endeavour for survival and significance amidst the irrationality of violence, as exemplified by this statement:

"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" (Hemingway 57).

In contradistinction, *Arms and the Man* is situated amidst the milieu of the comparatively obscure First Balkan War of 1885. The dramatic work of Shaw serves as a vehicle for the satirical critique of the idealised notions that are commonly associated with warfare. Through this literary device, the playwright effectively exposes the inherent senselessness and irrationality that underlie armed conflicts, as noted by Dukore (78). Shaw's selection of a lesser-known conflict serves as a means of scrutinising the exaltation of warfare on a more comprehensive level, while also questioning conventional notions of valour and nationalism, as referenced.

"Raina: You will kill them all, and you will be alone here with your great heroic death on your hands. Are you content?"

Bluntschli: Perfectly. You have hit it. It is just that that makes life worth living" (Shaw 64).

As per Shaw's work, Bluntschli's response is indicative of a profound understanding of the essence of life. The character's assertion that the aforementioned sentiment is what renders life

meaningful is a poignant reflection of the human condition. (Shaw 64)

The literary work of Hemingway, specifically *A Farewell to Arms* is indicative of the impact of Italian Fascism, which was gaining momentum during the period in which the novel was composed. The author does not overtly tackle the issue of fascism in the plotline, however, the presence of this political ideology looms in the backdrop, serving as a manifestation of the prevailing political instability and the gradual decay of conventional beliefs (Reynolds 56). The intricate layers of political influence imbue the characters' experiences with a nuanced complexity. Shaw's *Arms and the Man* is a literary work that delves into the critical analysis of the epoch of colonialism and imperialism that was widespread during the latter part of the 19th century. Grene's analysis of the play underscores its critical examination of imperial powers, exposing their hypocrisy and superior attitudes. The play effectively subverts romanticised depictions of colonial heroism, while simultaneously advocating for social reform. (Grene 61). Shaw's socio-political critique is indicative of his overarching endeavour to confront societal inequities and galvanise public consciousness, as evidenced by the subtext.

"Raina: Do you think we will ever get rid of the old-fashioned ideas that no longer serve any purpose and are a positive nuisance to respectable people?" (Shaw 78).

The literary works in question delve into the examination of the socio-cultural ramifications of warfare upon the human psyche, yet they diverge in their representation of the aftermath. Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* portrays a verisimilar and unvarnished portrayal of the dehumanising consequences of warfare on the characters. The author's narrative in question accentuates the ramifications of war on both the physical and psychological well-being of the characters, while also underscoring the protagonist's feelings of disillusionment and bereavement (Benson 112). George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* exhibits a shift in focus towards

the critique of societal conventions and the challenge of gender roles. The theatrical work scrutinises the incongruity between semblance and actuality within the context of the Victorian era and showcases robust female personages who challenge the conventional gender norms (Kirkpatrick 115). The utilisation of war as a literary device in the play serves as a means of instigating an in-depth examination of wider socio-cultural themes.

The differentiation between the two works can also be attributed to their treatment of gender roles and relationships. *A Farewell to Arms* offers a nuanced depiction of gender roles and identities. According to Beegel (91), Catherine Barkley's active involvement in the war effort challenges the conventional gender roles. However, the novel ultimately upholds the traditional gender norms, as the male protagonist grapples to find meaning and comfort in the midst of the war's turmoil. Shaw's *Arms and the Man* presents a departure from the conventional Victorian notions of femininity. The theatrical production showcases female protagonists who exhibit remarkable strength and assertiveness, challenging the norms and conventions of their respective societies while striving for autonomy. The depiction of Raina and Louka by Shaw serves as a challenge to conventional gender norms and underscores the burgeoning movement towards women's emancipation in the latter part of the 1800s (Kirkpatrick 115). Hemingway, known for his concise and direct writing style, was heavily influenced by his experiences as a journalist and ambulance driver during World War I. His personal beliefs, which were often reflected in his writing, included a strong sense of individualism and a disdain for traditional societal norms. Shaw, on the other hand, was a prolific playwright and essayist who was heavily involved in political and social activism. His literary background included a deep knowledge of classical literature and a keen understanding of the power of language. His personal beliefs were rooted in his socialist and feminist ideologies, which he often expressed through his writing. Despite their differences, both Hemingway and Shaw were influential figures in the literary world and continue to be studied and analysed by scholars today.

Hemingway's works often explore themes of masculinity, war, and the human condition, and his experiences as a journalist during the Spanish Civil War informed much of his writings. His style, characterised by brevity and realism, was influenced by his journalistic background and his affiliation with the "Lost Generation" of writers (Benson 112). Despite his literary achievements, Hemingway's personal life was marked by tragedy and mental illness, and he ultimately took his own life in 1961. Hemingway's literary works frequently exhibit the existential anxiety that pervaded the Lost Generation. Baker's analysis reveals that the author's oeuvre is characterised by a persistent preoccupation with the quest for significance, the challenge of self-discovery, and the investigation of the human experience in the midst of a disordered and disenchanting reality (47). The protagonist's emotional detachment from the objects in question is evident in the following passage: "But after I had extracted them from their location, secured the entrance, and deactivated the illumination, my efforts proved futile. It was akin to bidding farewell to an inanimate sculpture" (Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, 25). The aforementioned excerpt serves as a paradigmatic illustration of the emotional disengagement and existential yearning that pervades Hemingway's literary oeuvre. In *A Farewell to Arms*, the author reflects on the notion that sacrificing oneself for the nation was once considered a noble and desirable act. However, in contemporary warfare, the act of dying for one's country is devoid of any sweetness or appropriateness. This sentiment is expressed in the following quote: "They wrote in the old days that it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country. But in modern war, there is nothing sweet nor fitting in your dying" (249).

Hemingway's literary philosophy was characterised by a strong adherence to stoicism, a celebration of masculinity, and a profound appreciation for the transformative power of personal experiences. The author Reynolds highlights the concept of the code hero, a character who demonstrates composure in challenging situations and confronts hardship with bravery (56). The literary oeuvre of Hemingway is imbued with

themes that are reflective of his personal beliefs and experiences. These themes include but are not limited to war, disillusionment, and a search for purpose. "I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice... and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it" (Hemingway 161). This passage reveals Hemingway's disillusionment with the concept of war and his scepticism towards conventional ideals of bravery and selflessness.

George Bernard Shaw's writing is characterised by his wit, social commentary, and unconventional characters. He was a prolific writer, producing over 60 plays, as well as numerous essays, articles, and books. Shaw was also a vocal advocate for social and political reform, and his activism is reflected in many of his works. George Bernard Shaw, a distinguished dramatist and commentator, was affiliated with the literary movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Shaw's literary style is distinguished by his acerbic humour, astute social commentary, and employment of satire, which can be attributed to the influence of Henrik Ibsen and the Fabian Society, as noted by Grene (61).

Shaw's ideological stance was firmly rooted in socialism, as evidenced by his unwavering commitment to the cause of social reform. His fervent advocacy for this movement was a hallmark of his literary and intellectual pursuits. The individual in question espoused the belief that art could serve as a conduit for increasing consciousness and effecting transformation. According to Grene (61), Shaw's dramatic works were heavily influenced by his personal convictions, resulting in a repertoire that frequently contested established conventions, brought to light instances of societal inequity, and championed the cause of parity. "Raina: Do you think we will ever get rid of the old-fashioned ideas that no longer serve any purpose and are a positive nuisance to respectable people?" (Shaw 78). This line is indicative of Shaw's conviction regarding the imperative nature of societal advancement, as well as his critical appraisal of antiquated customs.

The literary works of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and George Bernard Shaw's *Arms*

and *the Man* delve into the thematic elements of love, heroism, war, and sacrifice through unique narrative perspectives. The present study endeavours to conduct a comparative analysis of the treatment of certain themes in the two literary works under consideration. Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* offers a nuanced depiction of love set against the tumultuous backdrop of war. In Hemingway's work, the character of Frederic Henry is depicted as undergoing a range of emotional states, including both the heights of elation and the depths of despair, as he navigates the complex terrain of romantic love. Through this portrayal, the author highlights the fleeting and delicate quality of human relationships, underscoring the inherent vulnerability of such connections (163).

"I had gone to no place where the roads were frozen and hard as iron, where it was clear cold and dry and the snow was dry and powdery and hare-tracks in the snow and the peasants took off their hats and called you Lord and there was good hunting. I had gone to no such place but to the smoke of cafes and nights when the room whirled and you needed to look at the wall to make it stop, nights in bed, drunk, when you knew that that was all there was, and the strange excitement of waking and not knowing who it was with you, and the world all unreal in the dark and so exciting that you must resume again unknowing and not caring in the night, sure that this was all and all and all and not caring" (Hemingway 162).

The passage serves as an example of the chaotic and unpredictable nature of love in the novel. The text depicts instances of alluring fervour and ambiguity, accentuating the impermanence and evanescent quality of amorous bonds.

Contrarily, *Arms and the Man* adopts a satirical perspective towards the theme of love, thereby subverting idealised conceptions. Shaw's work is characterised by a critical examination of the traditional norms of romantic love, as well as an exploration of the pragmatic and intellectual

compatibility that exists between the various characters in the narrative (Shaw 48).

"Raina: My dear, soldiers don't think about dangers. Haven't you noticed how beautifully courageous a man is when he has something to fight for? Now, tell me: what has a chocolate cream soldier to fight for?" (Shaw 48). She questions the motivation of a "chocolate cream soldier," implying that such a soldier lacks a meaningful purpose to fight for. (Shaw 48).

The utterance articulated by Raina exemplifies Shaw's employment of satire in the context of romantic relationships.

The portrayal of heroism in Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* underscores the arduous endeavour of the individual to uphold their honour and principles amidst the turbulence and disappointment that pervade their surroundings. The protagonist Frederic Henry's inner turmoil and displays of bravery in Ernest Hemingway's work signify a subjective, rather than idealised, notion of heroism (132).

"I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice... and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it" (Hemingway 161). The quotation serves as a testament to Hemingway's critical appraisal of conventional ideals of heroism. The protagonist of the novel, Frederic Henry, articulates his disillusionment with the exaltation of sacrifice and scrutinises the worth of such deeds considering the irrational violence that characterises warfare.

George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* presents a satirical critique of conventional ideals of heroism. In his work, Shaw introduces Captain Bluntschli as a character who defies the traditional heroic archetype, thereby subverting the romanticised notions of valour in times of war (Shaw 29). "You know such heroism is very disturbing to domestic happiness. You ought to be more

considerate in your amours" (Shaw 48). Raina's satirical remark can be interpreted as a manifestation of Shaw's critical examination of the societal norms and traditional notions of heroism. Raina's portrayal challenges the conventional heroic archetype, positing that acts of heroism may potentially disturb the domestic equilibrium and raise doubts about the feasibility of idealised heroism.

War serves as a significant backdrop in both novels, but with contrasting perspectives. *A Farewell to Arms* is a poignant portrayal of the harrowing effects of war on individuals. The author delves into the themes of disillusionment, loss, and the futility of conflict, as evidenced by his masterful storytelling techniques (Hemingway 74). "But after I had got them out and shut the door and turned off the lights it wasn't any good. It was like saying good-bye to a statue" (Hemingway 25). The semantic emptiness of the farewell act is a recurrent theme in literary works, where it is often portrayed as a gesture that loses its significance, reduced to a mere mechanical action akin to parting ways with an inanimate entity. The text effectively communicates the profound psychological impact of warfare and the resultant erosion of interpersonal relationships.

In *Arms and the Man* Shaw employs a satirical approach to war, unveiling its irrationality and questioning the exaltation of military confrontations (Shaw 64). "Do you think we soldiers enjoy living with nothing but our pay and our courage?" (Shaw 29). The utilisation of a rhetorical question serves to underscore the incongruity that exists between the commonly held beliefs regarding military personnel and the harsh realities they confront on a daily basis. This technique effectively accentuates the tangible difficulties that soldiers encounter, thereby emphasising the material deprivations they must endure.

In Hemingway's literary work, the protagonist expresses a sense of discomfort towards the terms "sacred," "glorious," and "sacrifice." "I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice... and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it" (Hemingway 161). The

forementioned quotation is indicative of the protagonist's disenchantment with the conventional ideals of selflessness. The literary oeuvre presents a critical stance towards the exaltation of sacrifice, positing that the sacrifices undertaken by individuals are frequently devoid of meaning and remain unacknowledged or undervalued.

George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* presents a departure from conventional beliefs about sacrifice by exposing its shallowness and the concealed incentives that underlie it. The author Shaw employs the literary device of satire to bring to light the prevalent hypocrisy and idealised notions surrounding the act of sacrifice. "Louka: Do you think she'll sacrifice herself for you? Captain Bluntschli: God forbid!" (Shaw 78). The present dialogue among the dramatis personae accentuates the derision of the act of sacrifice in the theatrical work. Shaw's inquiry delves into the authenticity and underlying impetuses of sacrificial deeds, postulating that they may be propelled by concealed incentives or cultural norms rather than bona fide altruism.

In *A Farewell to Arms* the motif of rain holds great significance as it conveys the dual themes of rejuvenation and imminent calamity. As Hemingway posits, the work in question embodies instances of cathartic release, purgation, and the inescapable tempests that upend and obliterate felicity. In *Arms and the Man* the motif of the chocolate cream soldier serves as a poignant symbol that highlights the dichotomy between surface-level appearances and underlying truths. According to Shaw, the symbol employed in the text serves to illustrate the fallacy of heroism and to deconstruct the idealised notions that prove to be untenable upon closer scrutiny.

The utilisation of rain as a symbol in *A Farewell to Arms* conveys the ominous and capricious nature of warfare, thereby evoking a melancholic and fatalistic atmosphere. The work in question exhibits a profound exploration of the themes of loss, mortality, and the inescapable tragedy that pervades the lives of its characters. The character of the chocolate cream soldier in George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* serves to subvert conventional notions of heroism. The text illustrates

the theme of appearance versus reality, while simultaneously employing satire to critique the idealisation of war and heroism. The aforementioned symbol functions as a means of deconstructing societal fallacies and scrutinising the genuineness of heroism. "The white elephant! The white elephant!" (Shaw 39). The exclamation serves to underscore the significance of the white elephant as a symbol, subsequently functioning as a metaphor for the ostentatious and superfluous tendencies of contemporary society. The text elucidates the vacuity of material possessions and the fruitless endeavour to attain social standing and opulence.

The White Elephant has been a recurring motif in literature, and its symbolic significance has evolved over time. This study seeks to trace the evolution of the White Elephant's symbolism, from its origins in ancient mythology to its contemporary interpretations in modern literature. By analysing the various contexts in which the White Elephant appears, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex symbolism of this fascinating creature. The utilisation of the white elephant as a symbol in *Arms and the Man* represents the arduous and unproductive endeavours of the aristocracy. The text conveys a thematic concern with the futility of material wealth and societal norms, exposing the shallowness and irrationality of cultural conventions.

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