



Grit and the Code Hero: Pain and Endurance in Hemingway's Vision of Life

Dr. Sreenivas Madupu^{1*}, Dr. G. Pavani², Dr. Srinivas Cheepurusetty³

¹CVR College of Engineering, Mangalpalli (V), Ibrahimpatan (M), R.R. District, Hyderabad - 501510, Telangana, India.

Email: smadupu9@gmail.com | ORCID: 0009-0007-9502-6252

*Corresponding Author

²Associate Professor, Guru Nanak University, Ibrahimpatnam, R.R. District - 501506, Hyderabad, Telangana, India.

Email: Pavani.doe@gnuindia.org

³Senior Assistant Professor, CVR College of Engineering, Hyderabad, Telangana, India.

Email: srinithree@gmail.com

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.14.2.86](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.14.2.86)



Article info

Article Received: 16/03/2026
Article Accepted: 20/04/2026
Published online: 29/04/2026

Abstract

Ernest Hemingway's fiction is often linked with tragedy, violence, and human suffering, yet beneath this lies a deep reflection on resilience and endurance. This paper explores his treatment of pain through *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Old Man and the Sea*. The former portrays the brutality of war and personal loss, while the latter depicts a fisherman's solitary struggle against nature. Together, they express Hemingway's idea of the "code hero," defined not by success but by the courage to persist despite inevitable defeat.

Positioning Hemingway within resilience studies and existential thought, the paper argues that his work goes beyond tragedy to affirm human dignity through endurance. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic Henry's encounter with loss reveals the futility of resisting death, yet his acceptance reflects existential resilience. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago's battle with the marlin symbolizes quiet heroism, where meaning lies in struggle rather than outcome. Through close textual analysis and critical perspectives, this study highlights Hemingway's contribution to modernist literature by redefining pain as a source of strength and dignity.

Keywords: Ernest Hemingway, resilience, code hero, pain, endurance, modernist literature

Introduction

Ernest Hemingway occupies a central position in twentieth-century literature, not only for his stylistic innovations but also for his thematic engagement with the complexities of human suffering. His characters often confront war, death, and the indifference of nature, yet they embody a form of stoic endurance that critics have come to identify as the Hemingway “code.” This philosophy emphasizes courage, honor, and resilience in the face of inevitable defeat. While Hemingway’s fiction has frequently been interpreted through the lens of tragedy, it is equally compelling to view his work as a sustained meditation on resilience.

This article examines *A Farewell to Arms* and *The Old Man and the Sea* as texts that illustrate the paradox of Hemingway’s vision: the acknowledgment of suffering as universal and inescapable, yet simultaneously the affirmation of endurance as the hallmark of human dignity. By focusing on these two works, which represent distinct phases of Hemingway’s career, the paper underscores the continuity of his artistic engagement with pain and resilience.

Discussion / Theoretical Framework: Pain, Resilience, and the Code Hero

The concept of resilience, commonly associated with psychology and trauma studies, refers to the human capacity to withstand adversity and adapt meaningfully in the aftermath of suffering. Within literary studies, resilience provides a framework for analyzing how characters respond to overwhelming challenges and how narratives encode strategies of survival. Hemingway’s code hero embodies this ethos of resilience: a figure who faces inevitable defeat yet does so with honor, grace, and composure.

Philip Young’s seminal study *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration* identifies the recurrent “wounded hero” in Hemingway’s fiction, a character marked by injury yet defined by the courage to endure. Later critics, such as

Carlos Baker and Linda Wagner-Martin, extend this analysis to suggest that Hemingway’s characters embody a form of existential resilience, echoing the philosophical insights of thinkers such as Albert Camus and Friedrich Nietzsche.

Pain and Loss in *A Farewell to Arms*

Published in 1929, *A Farewell to Arms* is one of Hemingway’s most overtly tragic novels, chronicling the love story of Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley against the backdrop of World War I. The novel is steeped in disillusionment: Frederic’s desertion from the army, the couple’s escape to Switzerland, and ultimately Catherine’s death in childbirth. Yet amid its bleakness, the novel illustrates Hemingway’s enduring concern & resilience.

Frederic’s confrontation with loss reflects the futility of resisting mortality. Catherine’s death, described with Hemingway’s signature understatement, leaves Frederic utterly alone, yet he refuses to indulge in self-pity. His silent walk back to the hotel in the rain becomes emblematic of existential acceptance. Pain in *A Farewell to Arms* is unavoidable, but Henry’s refusal to deny reality demonstrates Hemingway’s belief that dignity arises not from escape but from confrontation.

Endurance and Dignity in *The Old Man and the Sea*

If *A Farewell to Arms* explores resilience amid war and personal loss, *The Old Man and the Sea* presents an allegory of endurance in the natural world. Santiago, the aged fisherman, embarks on a solitary struggle with a giant marlin that lasts for days. Though ultimately defeated when sharks devour his hard-won prize, Santiago is not diminished. Instead, he embodies the essence of Hemingway’s code hero: unwavering courage, endurance without complaint, and a recognition that struggle itself defines meaning.

Santiago’s repeated refrain—“a man can be destroyed but not defeated”—encapsulates

Hemingway's philosophy of resilience. The old man's endurance transforms defeat into moral victory, illustrating that resilience lies not in success but in persistence.

Critical Perspectives

Hemingway's exploration of pain and resilience has been the subject of sustained scholarly attention. Linda Wagner-Martin argues that Hemingway's characters, though often damaged, resist despair by adhering to a personal code of honor. Jeffrey Meyers, in his biography *Hemingway: A Biography*, suggests that Hemingway's personal experiences with war and injury shaped his literary emphasis on endurance. More recent critics, such as Mark Cirino and Suzanne del Gizzo, have expanded the discussion by situating Hemingway within contemporary debates about trauma, healing, and human dignity.

Viewed through this lens, Hemingway emerges as a writer who bridges modernist concerns with contemporary insights into resilience. His characters do not overcome suffering in the conventional sense; rather, they endure, affirming meaning through their refusal to surrender.

Conclusion

Hemingway's fiction is often remembered for its stark depictions of war, death, and suffering, yet an equally significant aspect of his vision lies in the affirmation of resilience. In *A Farewell to Arms*, Frederic Henry's acceptance of loss demonstrates the dignity of confronting reality without illusion. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago's solitary struggle embodies the triumph of endurance over despair. Together, these works illustrate Hemingway's philosophy of the code hero, a figure who transcends pain through resilience and grace.

Far from offering nihilism, Hemingway redefines tragedy as a pathway to dignity, suggesting that human worth lies not in the avoidance of suffering but in the courage to

endure it. In this sense, Hemingway's fiction remains profoundly relevant, offering readers not only a record of human pain but also a testament to the resilience that defines the human spirit.

References

- Baker, C. (1972). *Hemingway: The writer as artist*. Princeton University Press.
- Cirino, M., & Ott, M. P. (Eds.). (2010). *Hemingway and the geography of memory*. Kent State University Press.
- Del Gizzo, S., & Svoboda, F. J. (Eds.). (2015). *Hemingway's The old man and the sea: New essays*. Kent State University Press.
- Hemingway, E. (1929). *A farewell to arms*. Scribner.
- Hemingway, E. (1952). *The old man and the sea*. Scribner.
- Meyers, J. (1985). *Hemingway: A biography*. Harper & Row.
- Reynolds, M. (1976). *Hemingway's first war: The making of A farewell to arms*. Princeton University Press.
- Wagner-Martin, L. (2007). *Ernest Hemingway: A literary life*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Waldmeir, J. J. (1990). Confiteor hominem: Ernest Hemingway's religion of man. In H. Bloom (Ed.), *The old man and the sea: A critical edition* (pp. 15-28). Chelsea House.
- Young, P. (1966). *Ernest Hemingway: A reconsideration*. Pennsylvania State University Press.