

## ***Differance in the Discourse of Catherine and Henry in Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms: A Post-structural Approach***

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### **Abstract (Use 12-point Font Times New Roman, bold caps)**

This study aimed to make the post-structural analysis of Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms with the help of Derrida's concept of Differance. The study found that there is a complete disparity between the meaning that these characters try to convey and the one that the contextual analysis of their discourse establishes when viewed through the spectrum of differance. The findings lead to the conclusion that for real happiness in life one must establish genuinely sympathetic and empathic relations with others. Only love and compassion can make life meaningful. It is an individual's responsibility to explore his or her choices and opt for them bravely. To get rid of the absurdity of life one must make drastic decision and daring use of options available to one, otherwise the coercive structure of the society will crush their individuality.

### **Keywords:**

Hemingway, Derrida, differance, absurdity, choices responsibility

## **1 Introduction**

The inception of Poststructuralism by Derrida in 1960's has to be reckoned as a big stride in the development of critical theory that according to its exponents like Adorno (1990) and Horkheimer (1979) was a proper approach to understand the true nature of reality. Derrida's concept of Differance proved an effective tool to deconstruct a phenomenon for appreciating its true nature (Spivak, 1997). Literature is also a process of giving meaning to experiences but almost always a superficial approach to it causes a reader to miss the hidden paradigms of thought that actually inspired its production. The clear-cut understanding of these deep paradigms of thought often prove that the general meaning attached to a piece of literature is surprisingly opposite and sometimes incorrect than the one that actually a text possesses (Adorno, 1978).

As Derrida's (1997) concept of differance is one of the most effective tools that help us to delve deeply into the texts to reach at the deeper meanings that serve as basic foundation to a piece of literature, this study also aims to make the prime use of this post-structural tool to

dig out the deeper meanings of Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* with particular reference to its two main characters Catherine and Henry.

## **2 Theoretical Framework**

Derrida created the term *differance* by deliberately misspelling the word *difference* just to show that speech often remains unable to communicate reality completely and the prop of writing provides the real help to it to reflect the kind of meaning it wants to convey (Spivak, 1997). Mere verbal utterance of the word *difference* may make the listener think that the speaker is using the word *difference*, but the written form of the word makes them realize that it is not *difference* but *differance*. This simply establishes the idea that making an estimation of reality merely on the basis of its superficial observation often causes the observer to have its wrong understanding. In order to have proper estimation of reality one must examine it in its different forms from diachronic and synchronic point of view. This leads Derrida to theorize that meaning of a sign has both differing and deferring aspects so to make a prompt interpretation of a phenomenon on the basis of its apparent claims is a wrong approach in determining its reality and meaning. Change of time and space i.e. that of the context keeps exuding the other shades of meaning and it is by keeping in mind all these manifestations of meaning that some more reliable overall estimation of reality can be reached at.

Derrida (1997) argues that to understand the true nature of the claims made by a text one must raise questions upon the rationality and validity of these ideas to see how consistent they are with the objections raised upon them. Once the questions are raised, start finding their answers and deconstruction will occur that he also terms as the process of discovering *differance*. This will reveal if the ideas are true or false, reliable or unreliable. If they answer the questions or objections they are reliable, if not then they are not valid and reliable and need amendments.

Derrida also uses the term *trace* as an alternative to explicate the concept of *differance*. In French language the word *Trace* has many meanings. It is used in the sense of path or mark. Because the meaning of the sign takes birth with its contradictions that it has with other signs so using a very complex reasoning process Derrida (1997) argues that Sign is a sort of a trace in itself. It is a trace of a meaning that it actually does not claim to have or that it apparently does not reflect, though the deep contemplation upon it may lead us to that absent meaning. Though on its face value it always claims the meaning that actually it does not have, still it

refers to that meaning that actually is somewhere deep under the surface. Particularly when it comes to binary opposition then this opposition or contradiction refers to that meaning that they both do not have on individual level, but their combination creates that meaning. Derrida intentionally does not establish a clear-cut meaning of the term trace, for he believes that it is impossible as it always keeps changing. Besides trace, Arch writing, phrmokes /Pharmakon, are the also words that Derrida (1997) uses in the sense of differance. It is the mark of the absence of the presence i.e. the sign of the existence of the one that is nonexistent. It hints at the existence of something that apparently does not exist.

Deconstruction or pinpointing differance is a process of putting an end to the internal contradiction of a text to reach at the concept of reality that is more reliable than one made by apparent claims of a text.

### **3 Research Questions**

Using this theoretical framework as a tool of investigation the present study aims to find out the answers of the following research questions.

1. What are their apparent claims and what truths they are trying to hide through these claims?
2. What helps us to perceive that their apparent behaviour and claims are not consistent with their actual state of mind?
3. What conclusions can be drawn through this dichotomy?

### **4 Literature Review**

Being the central figures of the novel, the characters of Henry and Catherine has always been the focus of special attention to the critics. Kaur (2014) points out that involvement and detachment are the two constant factors in the behaviour of Henry that points out that he is always dissatisfied with himself and with the things around him. His involvement in war, then visiting the girls in brothel in the earlier part of the story are just the efforts to get rid of the sense of emptiness. The study of Martinsson (2008) also point out that everything that Henry involves in, he soon feels dissatisfied with it. He does things without thinking about their consequences that hints at his sense of detachment with life and society.

Nasassab (2005) has focused on the character of Catherine to point out the plight of women during the first world war. Catherine's character points out with deep intensity the choices available to women in that wartime and the impact of the social conditions upon their heart and mind.

Kamble's study (2012) investigates the use of symbolism in this novel. Symbols used in this novel have same sort of connotation for both Catherine and Henry though Catherine openly expresses feelings regarding them and Henry keeps them in his heart but as he also is the narrator of this story we easily perceive the impact of these symbols upon him that is not different than the one that Catherine expresses. Catherine is always afraid of rain, but it is the silent behaviour of Henry that reflects the various connotations of rain as a symbol that it may stand for fate whose workings are beyond our control or it may merely be the response of God to the havocs that humans are causing on earth. At least rain makes things difficult for the people fighting war. It causes them to stop war and brings about new plants and flowers on earth as well. Though Henry does not consider it sufficient and believes that God should do something more to straighten the affairs of the world.

Existentialist study of this novel by Vaishnav (2012) establishes that the novel gives the message of constant struggle and being happy in every state of life. Henry and Catherine complement each other. Their behaviour taken as a whole is the most appropriate response that we need to give to life in all its shades.

Martinsson (2008) supports the school of feminism that Henry's character demonstrates the superiority of male over female. But the keen study of the novel reflects that it is the Character of Catherine that gives reasons to all the actions of Henry. She really leaves the reader with unforgettable impressions. Draughton (2006) also makes an analysis of this novel from the point of view of gender. He points out that generally masculine gender is considered emotionally more stable but in this novel the character of Catherine seems to be stronger than Henry from emotional point of view. Henry's character undergoes a little bit of evolution after meeting Catherine, but she remains constant up to the end of this novel from emotional point of view.

## **5 Research Methodology**

The discourse of Catherine and Henry will be analyzed according to the post-structural approach of Derrida that serves as the theoretical framework of this study. This analysis of the

discourse will reveal if the meaning claimed by their discourse is consistent with the actual implications of the text and with the changes in context.

After finding out the consistencies or inconsistencies in their discourse study will furnish the conclusion that these findings may lead to.

### ***5.1 Data Analysis and Interpretation***

The superficial reading of the text presents Catherine as a nurse who loves Henry and is always ready to indulge in any sort of adventure with him without thinking about its conclusions. She does not like to go to church claiming that she does not believe in religion that suggests that she is an atheist. She claims to believe in the sense of morality springing from her own feelings and does not value the standards of morality upheld by society. She does not marry Henry fearing that the authorities might send her away from him. Her physical relations with Henry causes her to get pregnant. Her being unable to give birth to baby through normal delivery, doctors have to operate her as a last resort that causes her death.

When we analyze Catherine's love for Henry we find that before falling in love with Henry she was engaged with another man who had died in the war. She seems to be suffering with the sense of regret that she could not give any happiness to her previous lover. We can say that according to Derrida's concept of supplement (1997), for her, the love of Henry was a supplement for the love of her previous lover who had died. Now all the love and devotion that she wanted to give to her previous lover she showered it upon Henry. This makes this love akin to the concept of deferred meaning in difference, for it was after the death of her previous lover that she realized that to enjoy the present moment is the best approach to life. This is why she established physical relations with Henry without caring about marriage.

She did not like to go church and always claimed that she did not have any religion. When Henry asked her for marriage she said:

“There's no way to be married except by church or state. We are married privately. You see, darling, it would mean everything to me if I had any religion. But I haven't any religion. ... You are my religion. You are everything I 'v got.” (Hemingway, 1977, p. 85).

Henry promises her to marry her the day she would say, and she replies:

“Don't talk as though you had to make an honest woman of me, darling. I 'm a very honest women. You can't be ashamed

of something if you 're only happy and proud of it. Aren't you happy" (Hemingway, 1977, p. 85).

But the analysis of the discourse and actions of Catherine point out that she had very strong religious feelings. She did believe that some unseen power was controlling the affairs of their lives. For example, when she tells Henry that she has got pregnant she asks Henry:

You aren't angry are you, darling?  
[Henry]No.  
[Catherine] And you don't feel trapped?  
[Henry] Maybe a little, But not by you."  
[Catherine] I didn't mean by me. You mustn't be stupid. I meant trapped at all.  
[Henry] You always feel trapped biologically.  
(Hemmingway, 1977, p. 102-103)

In this discourse Catherine talks about being trapped. Now the person who presents oneself as an atheist, should never confess in the existence of some Godlike power that can trap them and affect the affairs of their life, but this is what her thoughts suggest here. In fact, Henry's reply that he feels himself biologically trapped seems more nonreligious and materialistic as compared to the idea of Catherine.

Moreover, they always claim that they have taken one another as husband and wife in spite of not marrying in a conventional way but their sad reaction at the prospect of being the parents of a child betrays that this claim is also a sort of self-deception. Married people feel happy at the prospect of having child. They feel it a sort of trap. Most importantly Catherine's obsequious manners to make Henry happy after his being gloomy at this news shows that she is not sure that Henry's love for her is genuine. Her manners suggest her feelings that she is going to be a burden upon him now and Henry's manners also suggest that he takes her now as a sort of liability. All this belies their claims of loving one another genuinely and taking each other as real husband and wife without marriage.

Again, in the ending chapter at the time of her death her expression categorically affirm that she did believe in the concepts God, soul and life after death.

[Catherine] "You won't do our Things with other girls or say the same things, will you?  
[Henry]Never  
[Catherine] I want you to have girls enough.  
You are talking too much, the doctor said. "Mr. Henry must go out. He can come back later. You are not going to die. You must not be silly"

[Catherine] All right, "I will come and stay with you nights".  
It was very hard for her to talk.  
"Please go out of the room," the doctor said,  
Catherine winked at [Henry], her face grey.  
I'll be right outside, [Henry] said.  
[Catherine] Don't worry, darling, I'm not a bit afraid. It's just a dirty trick.  
[Henry] You dear, brave sweet."  
(Hemingway, 1977, p.235)

This discourse at the time of her death belies her claim of being unreligious as to believe in the existence of some supreme power that invisibly controls the affairs of your life, to believe in the concept of soul and life after death are the concepts that religion imparts to humans and she strongly believed in such concepts as she said that she would come to meet Henry in nights even after her death. In line with Derrida's (1997) concept of *Differance* this is the deferred meaning that differs with the one that actually is claimed by Catherine throughout the story. Here Catherine's claim that she is not afraid of death also seems inconsistent with the meaning that the previous parts of the story establish. She told Henry the reason of being afraid of rain for it brings to her mind the image of her own or that of Henry's death. The fact is that it is the intense sense of being pursued by death constantly that keeps them broken and unhappy inwardly. In the backdrop of this fact her claim that she is not afraid of death is just an act of accepting her defeat bravely. But the pity is that she had accepted this defeat long ago. Again, her claim that she would come to meet her even after death seem incongruent with this expression of hopelessness.

Moreover, though Catherine claimed that in spite of not marrying Henry she never felt any sense of guilt on her physical relations with him but at times she did express the sense of guilt. For example, in chapter no. 23 when once she went in a hotel with Henry, He felt her unhappy there and asked her the reason of looking sad and she replied:

"I never felt like a whore before"  
[Henry] "You are not a whore."  
[Catherin] I know it darling but it isn't nice to feel like one"  
[Henry] "This was the best hotel we could get in..."  
[Catherin] "Oh, hell, do we have to argue now?" Come over here please. Come over, please. I'm a good girl again.  
(Hemingway, 1977, p.112)



This was a clear indication that at times she did feel that physical relations with a man without marriage makes a woman a whore.

This sort of inconsistency in the meaning claimed by the characters and the one that the deconstructive analysis of the text reveals is also apparent with reference to Henry. Henry's claims of genuine friendship with Rinaldi seem dubious when we view his behaviour with Rinaldi after Rinaldi introduced him to Catherine. Rinaldi told him that he is in love Catherine, but later Henry decides to develop relations with her that seems quite unethical when we realize that in the beginning he wanted to enjoy only physical relations with Catherine. In chapter 5 when Henry returns after meeting Catherine Rinaldi jests at his getting involved with Catherine. Henry does not like it for now he wants him to recede in the matter of Catherine. He shows his resentment. When Rinaldi realizes that the conversation may lead to some serious quarrel he gets quiet. But Henry, still as a sign of anger, knocks over the candle that Rinaldi lit to read a book. Rinaldi lights it again and goes on reading. But this whole event exemplifies that Henry's claims of friendship with Rinaldi are not genuine, that in spite of knowing the seriousness of Rinaldi about Catherine he forced him to draw back.

Even his love for Catherine does seem questionable. When Catherine tells him that she has got pregnant his whole expression changes. He does not express any happiness rather he becomes quite cold in behaviour. Catherine asks him if he feels trapped and he replies:

[Henry] Maybe a little, But not by you."  
 [Catherine] I didn't mean by me. You mustn't be stupid. I meant trapped at all.  
 [Henry] You always feel trapped biologically.  
 ...[Catherine] Always isn't a pretty word.  
 [Henry] I'm sorry.  
 [Catherine] It's all right. But you see I've never had a baby and I've never even loved anyone. And I've tried to be the way you want and then you talk about "always."  
 [Henry] I could cut off my tongue.  
 [Catherine] ... We must not [misunderstand on purpose] Because there is only us two and in the world there's all the rest of them. If anything comes between us we are gone and then they have us.  
 [Henry] They won't have us... because you are too brave. Nothing ever happens to the brave.  
 [Catherine] They die of course.  
 [Henry] But only once.  
 [Catherine] I don't know. Who said that?  
 [Henry] That cowards die a thousand deaths, the brave but one?



[Catherine] Of course. Who said it?

[Henry] I don't know.

[Catherine] He was probably a coward,'... He knew a great deal about cowards but nothing about the brave. The brave dies probably two thousand deaths if he is intelligent. He simply does not mention them. (Hemmingway, 1977, p. 102-103)

Henry says that he is not brave. he says "[He] feels himself like a batter that bates two hundred and thirty and knows he is no batter". She compliments him that it's awfully impressive that "a ball player bats two hundred and thirty balls. Henry says that it is not" [impressive] it means a mediocre hitter in a baseball. On complements that he is still a hitter Henry concludes that they both are conceited and they both are brave, and he fells himself very brave when he has had a drink. When Catherine brings him cognac he refuses to drink. When on Catherine's insistence he drinks a glass, he drinks too big a glass. Catherine exhorts him not to exaggerate in drinking brandy. But Henry poured one more glass to drink. All this betrayed his internal frustration on the news. Catherine left him to attend the patients promising that she would come in a while.

This whole discourse affirms that after the discovery that Catherine is pregnant he feels her a burdensome liability upon him. If he really had taken Catherine as a wife he would never have behaved in this manner, a fact that problematizes his claims of genuine love for Catherine. Perhaps Catherine also sensed this that is why throughout the novel her interaction with Henry seems quite obsequious. We always find her ready to find herself as a toy to satiate the carnal desires of Henry for strengthening her relations with him.

In fact, whether it be war or the love of Catherine he never embraces any affair of life with a sense of wholeheartedness. He became the part of war for he did not seem to have any purpose of life, but the meaninglessness of war soon dissatisfied him. Later he established relations with Catherine to get rid of the sense of absurdity of life, but his half-heartedness seems quit plausible in this affair as well.

Their discussion on the idea of being brave also reveals their deep sense of being unhappy and dejected. They both applaud each other on being brave whereas each of them feels that they are not. If they are, still they are not happy in spite of being brave. Catherine concludes that a person who said that a coward dies a thousand deaths before he is dead must be a coward, for brave dies two thousand deaths if he is intelligent. Now being intelligent means being able to think and find meaning and purpose in one's actions or things around him. But their intelligent

self-inquisition reveals the absence of any sort of meaning in life. If there had been any meaning they would never have displayed this much gloominess. It is just to get rid of this sense of absurdity and emptiness that Henry drinks a lot as on the idea of being brave he confesses that he always feels brave when he drinks wine.

Catherin says that they must not misunderstand each other on purpose. Because there is only they two and, in the world,, there are all the rest of the others. If anything comes between them they are gone and then those who are after them will have them. Now these words vehemently express their sense of being pitted against the social system in which they are living. It points out the level of stress and misery they are experiencing. All this establishes the idea that their efforts of finding meaning and happiness in one another are also to no avail. Marriage is a contract between a man and a woman and a contract must be made publicly in the presence of witnesses. This public declaration solemnizes the contract and makes a man and a woman legally and ethically bound to love and support one another in difficult times. It boosts their confidence in one another's love and sense of responsibility to one another. Though Henry and Catherine claim that they take each other for husband and wife but their relations being not socially solemnized, they are always suspicious of one another, particularly Catherine, whose manners of winning Henry's love and affection become more and more dishonourably obsequious after pregnancy. There would have been less possibility of such behaviour on the part of Catherine if their relations would have been legalized in the form of marriage as per social norms.

## 6 Conclusion

Coming back to the research questions, the deconstruction of the examples of discourse taken from the text comprehensively illustrates the contradictions between the apparent claims made by Henry and Catherine and the truths that they try to hide through these claims. The inconsistency, between the claims and the actual truths that the deconstruction of their discourse has brought forward, exemplifies Derrida's idea of the differing aspect of meaning in *Differance* that he terms as the inconsistency between the signified and signifier. This sort of plethora of meaning and incongruence between signifiers and signifieds can be perceived at all levels of this novel.

As for the second question the study finds that there is a clear-cut inconsistency between their body language and attitude and the words that they speak. Particularly in times of stress we find that all the claims of being happy and satisfied, that they used to make in happy moments, were self-deceiving illusions. This is a supreme manifestation of the inconsistency between differed meaning and deferred meaning. The meaning is differed because it is not in harmony with the actual claims that they make, and it is deferred because it is with the passage of time that it unfolds its true implications in which it had to be taken.

The third question of the study was, what conclusions can be drawn through this dichotomy? The answers to this question are also the examples of deferred meanings which are as follows: First the novel implicitly establishes the importance of religion as religion provides the more solid rationale to all our actions. The reasons of doing good and abstaining from evil can also be established through logic but same logic can provide the reasons of going against the principals of morality as well. Religion provides us more satisfying paradigms about the questions like how life should be looked upon, what is the true nature of death and how should we take the good and bad moments of life. And since happiness and satisfaction of heart is the most important thing and the real object of all our pursuits so discarding religion irrationally and unreasonably amounts to pursuing this goal where it cannot be achieved.

The novel also hints at the idea that instead of finding faults with God that it is because of His indifference that the world is the way it is, we must look at our own actions and decision that has brought the world to this critical pass. The things that we have spoilt through our own stupidity we have to straighten them through our own praxes accepting our faults and making amends for them. Humans have to take the responsibility of their actions. They must make daring decisions to give right direction to their lives. They must learn to perceive the message of nature through its working that always exhorts them to stop fight and make this world a beautiful place to live in.

Instead of being frenzied that we are being pursued by death we must live with a desire to leave a legacy behind us. Henry's indifference at the prospect of being the father of a child is pathetic. He does not show any concern about his life or death even at time of his birth. This hints at the sense of utter individualism that takes individuals to sheer loneliness and alienation in the long run. Death is inevitable only the desire to leave legacy of good behind us can relieve us of its pangs. Henry always remained dissatisfied with the pursuits that he adopted to create meaning and happiness in life but finally he finds long lasting happiness in the love of Catherine simply

because it awakened in him genuine emotions and anything that emotionally appeals you can create meaning in your life. Only love, empathy, compassion and sincere and genuine relation with people can create meaning in life.

From post structural point of view another deferred meaning that the study leads to is that though not all, most of the conventions of our social structures are in harmony with human nature as human nature feels more at ease when they are observed. Marriage and its legal solemnizing is also one of them. Before falling in love with Catherine, Henry established physical relations with many girls, but he always felt them to be devoid of any happiness. It was when he fell love with Catherine that he felt happier and more satisfied from emotional point of view. This evidences that true happiness of sex always come from love. The only shortcoming in this happiness that they occasionally felt was simply because they did not solemnize their marriage in a legal way according to the norms of the society. As it has been pointed out earlier that marriage is a contract between man and woman and its solemn declaration binds man and woman legally to take care of each other in all situations of life. This sense of responsibility substantiated by the legalization of marriage according to social conventions makes them surer of each other's love and trust. And from this trust springs the real sense of happiness that was missing in the relations of Henry and Catherine.

From this we can also infer that doing things against human nature always leads to misery. It creates anarchy and frustration in the society. We must respect and observe the social norms that are in harmony with basic human nature for they have come into being simply to make human societies more stable disciplined and happier. Marriage and family life is also one of those conventions. This is why the analysis revealed that Henry and Catherine in spite of being deeply attached with one another hide their true feelings from each other. They both try to find the meaning of life in one another but they both are dissatisfied with their search though they hide it from one another. Through their apparent interactions they make one another feel that they are happy, but the deep analysis of their discourse and their gestures belies their apparent claims.

When we interpret a text in the light of a theory we actually look for examples in the text that affirm the different constructs of that theory. Thus, this comparative study of the text and the theory actually establishes the validity of the theory as well. Derrida's (1997) concept of *differance* is an effective tool that helps us to see the changes in meaning both from synchronic and diachronic points and also reveals that to what extent the claimed meaning of the characters

is consistent with the contextual details in which they are interacting. Thus, it brings forward even those ideas that the speakers try to hide. The present study leads to the realization that differing aspects of meaning come forward both from the synchronic and diachronic relations of the signifiers, but the deferred meaning is mainly the result of the diachronic analysis of the text.

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