

THE THREE HEROINES  
IN  
ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S NOVELS  
ACROSS THE RIVER AND INTO THE TREES, A FAREWELL TO ARMS  
AND  
FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

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## THESIS DIGEST

The predominant criticism of the heroines of Ernest Hemingway's novels Across the River and into the Trees, For Whom the Bell Tolls, and A Farewell to Arms is that they are unreal fantasy women. The purpose of this paper is to affirm that the heroines of these novels are predominantly unreal by examining their relationships to the heroes, and to demonstrate that any reality they do have is apparent only apart from their lives with the heroes.

Colonel Cantwell, Robert Jordan, and Frederick Henry, the heroes of the three novels, are stereotypes of Ernest Hemingway's hero-code. They are men who think superiorly and do all things excellently in order to give some meaning to life. These men secretly fear death; they are forced to action because of their fear, risking death to overcome the inferiority of the mortality of their bodies. When inevitable death does come for them they meet it with exceptional courage.

Renata, Maria, and Catherine Barkley, the heroines of the three novels are stereotypes of Hemingway's women in a Man's world who are needed only as a relief from the spiritually and physically exhausting activities in which the heroes engage. These women give of themselves unrestrainedly trying to please the heroes, and they do so demanding nothing

lasting for themselves. They do desire futures with their men but they never press them for definite commitments. The men, realizing that legitimate, spiritual love and marriage would lead to complications which would restrain their lives of courageous activities, pacify the womens' desires by dreaming with them about the future, knowing, however, that there can be no lasting relationship.

The overwhelming importance of the men in these three novels overshadows the heroines so that they seem to be but wish-fulfillments of the servile women dreamed of by Hemingway heroes. However, these women do have personalities and some reality in the stories. This beginning of depth to the women is gleaned from the portions of their life histories which are related, by allusions to their relationships with other men, and by the descriptions of their physical and personality traits. Even though their histories and relationships with other men are referred to only briefly, and the descriptions of their personalities and physical characteristics are only begun, there is enough of such material so that the women are shown to exist as individuals. They exist in their own world of activities where the heroes are not present or are not necessary.

Renata, of Across the River and into the Trees, is unreal in her relationship with Colonel Cantwell, for he excludes her from any real sharing of his life. She seeks to purge him of his feelings of guilt about World War II by hearing his war experiences. He does not accept her as an

instrument to purge his feeling, however; he tells her the most important parts while she is sleeping so that he is purged, but she has been a passive instrument in the process. He excludes her, too, when he reminisces about the war with an army companion. He also resists her suggestion that they be buried together saying that death must be done alone. Colonel Cantwell comes closest to forgetting his heroic pride when making love to Renata. But, even in this she is used only to gratify his needs.

Catherine Barkley of A Farewell to Arms at first seems to be just a sexual playmate for the hero, Frederick Henry. Physical love dominates their relationship while he is in the army hospital. As the story develops, however, the couple's love deepens and Catherine is needed as a companion by Frederick Henry after he deserts from the army. During this time Catherine voices a wish for their lives to be one. But, Frederick Henry does not give of himself to that degree. Catherine's ensuing pregnancy is a flaw in the couple's relationship for it represents the complication which cannot exist in a hero's life. Her death is, therefore, inevitable, for when she dies Frederick Henry is left alone to figure out his future. As a Hemingway heroine Catherine accepted her role as an undemanding mate for the hero and was an unreal woman for doing so.

The love affair of Maria and Robert Jordan of For Whom the Bell Tolls, although it is nobler than the others because Robert Jordan is trying to help Maria forget her

past, is still the usual Hemingway hero-heroine relationship. Their love is dominated by sensual feelings. Maria, just as Renata and Catherine Barkley, gives herself to her hero, dreaming of a future with him, but really not expecting one. Robert Jordan excludes her from his work, the most important part of his life, saying it must be done alone. Her exclusion is complete at his death, for he dies bravely and alone--a hero's death.

All three women, Renata, Catherine Barkley, and Maria could be real women in these novels if they had acted on the knowledge that their relationships with the heroes will not last, and been less compliant to the men's demands because of that knowledge. Without such independence, the knowledge undermines their reality; even though they know they are being used by the men, they act as Hemingway heroines to the heroes, submitting themselves in order to please them. None of their life histories, personality traits, or physical descriptions can overcome the unreality of their compliance. It must be so, for Hemingway's fictional world is dominated by his men.