

The Weight of Words

To quote people simply means to repeat their words. It does not seem complicated, nor does it seem very important. What is really important, though, is the meaning behind those words. That is the whole reason why people take the time to repeat what another has said, because they recognize those words hold meaning behind them and that they are worth repeating. One of the things people tend to quote often is literature, such as the book *A Farewell to Arms*, by Ernest Hemingway. People quote lines from this book because they understand the meaning behind Hemingway's words and desire to share it with others.

One quotation from this book is: “A coward dies a thousand deaths, the brave but one’.... [The man who first said that] was probably a coward.... He knew a great deal about cowards but nothing about the brave. The brave dies perhaps two thousand deaths if he's intelligent. He simply doesn't mention them.” With this particular quote, Hemingway is actually critiquing another quote. Most people have heard others say a coward dies a thousand deaths, but the brave only dies once. Hemingway is saying he disagrees, and the man who was the first to say that obviously did not know what it was like to be brave. Hemingway is quite possibly speaking from experience because he was in World War I as an ambulance driver for the Italians and was badly wounded while performing his duties. So, it is very likely he knows what it means to be brave.

When saying the brave die perhaps two thousand times, Hemingway is implying those who are brave have faced death many times, and, because they are intelligent, they were able to come back alive. The coward, on the other hand, only has to face the shame of his cowardice. When saying the brave do not mention their “deaths,” he means the brave know coming back

alive from facing those horrible things is not something to boast about, but instead it is something to be thankful for.

A second quote is: “No, that is the great fallacy: the wisdom of old men. They do not grow wise. They grow careful.” People often consider older people to be wise because they have gone through life and its trials and survived. As a result, they know more about how they should act or respond to different things and, because of that, they are considered wise. Hemingway suggests a different point of view. Rather than considering them as wise, he instead says they have grown careful. The definition of wise is, “Having the ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting.” The definition of careful is, “Attentive to potential danger, error, or harm.” Hemingway is basically saying rather than being better able to discern truth, older people are instead more attentive to danger and are, therefore, better able to avoid it.

One of the most well known quotes from *A Farewell to Arms* is:

“If people bring so much courage to this world the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry.”

Hemingway had a rather morbid point of view, and he was depressed. This can be seen throughout his writing, especially in this quote. This quote can be broken up into two sections, the first being “If people bring...those that will not break it kills,” and “It kills the very good...there will be no special hurry.”

The main thing Hemingway is saying in the first part is the world attempts to break everyone, no matter who you are, though there are some it puts more effort into breaking than

others. For the ones it can break, they become stronger because of it, but for those it can not, the world, instead, kills them. Hemingway is implying the world is an unforgiving place and for those who will not go the way the world wants them to go, who have courage to stand firm against it, the world will kill them. In the second part, Hemingway is saying no matter if you are “good,” “gentle,” or “brave,” the world will kill you just the same. For those who are not any of those things, the world will still kill you, but there is not a big rush to do so.

When Hemingway says “the world,” he is referring to the circumstances and the situations people have to face. For the ones who are exceptional, it stands to reason they would put themselves out into the world and experience situations the ordinary person would not. Those situations they put themselves in will be more dangerous than if they had decided to do nothing. So, it is really no surprise “the world” would “break” or “kill” them more quickly than the average person. For the ordinary person, though, they will still eventually die because no one can escape death.

Another quote is: “I’m not brave any more darling. I’m all broken. They’ve broken me.” This last quote holds a lot of meaning, especially in light of the previous quote that was analyzed. The one who is saying this line is Catherine, the love of the main character, Henry. She says this to him after she gave birth to their stillborn child and is dying from multiple hemorrhages. Up until now, she had withstood many trials, not only by her own strength, but with Henry’s as well. She was good, gentle, and brave, and the world had already tried to break her but could not. So, it killed her. In doing so, it broke her. That is why she says she is no longer brave and that she is now broken. When she says “they’ve broken me,” she is referring to the world and the situations she has faced. It was finally too much for her.

There is so much one can do with words. They could be used to weave a fanciful story to tell a child as they go to sleep. They could be used to express their deepest feelings to another. They could be used to teach someone how the world works. They could also be used to tell lies to someone or verbally abuse them. Words can be a dangerous tool, and one never knows when something they say could end up being repeated by another. Therefore, one must be careful with them. Words and the meaning behind them are powerful, so use them wisely.