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HEMINGWAY'S

A FAREWELL TO ARMS



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A FAREWELL TO ARMS

NOTES

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- *General Introduction*
- *List of Characters*
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Code Hero, Dramatic Structure, Style*
- *Character Studies*
- *Questions and Theme Topics*
- *Bibliography*

by

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A FAREWELL TO ARMS

LIFE AND BACKGROUND

In his earlier years Hemingway relished the nickname “Champ,” which exemplified his roistering, hard-fisted outdoor life of adventure. In his later years, ^{illustrate} he delighted in being called “Papa” and had the reputation of a worldwide celebrities’ celebrity, almost a legendary character. He often helped to further the legend in lively ways. During World War II, when he was an American war correspondent, there was no doubt who had helped liberate the Ritz hotel in Paris. A guard was found posted at the entrance with a notice, “Papa took good hotel. Plenty stuff in the cellar.”

Hemingway’s colorful life began in quiet Oak Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, where he was born July 21, 1899. His father was a physician, and Ernest was the second of six children born to Dr. and Mrs. Clarence E. Hemingway. His mother, a devout, religious woman with considerable musical talent, hoped that Ernest would develop an interest in music. Ernest acquired his father’s enthusiasm for guns and for fishing trips in the Michigan north woods, and that phase of his childhood formed important impressions reflected later in Nick Adams stories like “Indian Camp” and “Big Two-Hearted River.”

Hemingway played high school football and learned to box, incurring permanent eye damage that caused the army to reject his repeated efforts to enlist in World War I. Boxing also gave Hemingway a lasting enthusiasm for prize fighting, material for stories, and a tendency to talk of his literary accomplishments later in boxing terms.

He edited the high school newspaper, twice ran away from home, and on graduating from high school, Hemingway headed for Kansas City to enlist despite parental objections that he was too young—seventeen. Rejected by the army, he went to the Kansas City *Star*, a national newspaper, where he added a year to his age

and was hired as a reporter. (For that reason Hemingway's birth date is often given as 1898 rather than the correct 1899.)

Finally, Hemingway succeeded in joining a volunteer American Red Cross ambulance unit as a driver. He was so seriously wounded at Fossalta on the Italian Piave on July 8, 1918, that he recalled life slid from him, "like you'd pull a silk handkerchief out of a pocket by a corner," almost fluttered away, then returned. It is thought by some literary observers that the experience gave Hemingway a fear of his own fear and the lifetime need to continually test his courage through dangerous adventures.

After a dozen operations on his knee and recuperation in Milan, he returned, with an aluminum kneecap and two Italian decorations, to join the Italian infantry. These vivid experiences later provided background for *A Farewell to Arms* in 1929.

War—the cruelty and stoic endurance that it requires—forms a major part of Hemingway's writing, beginning with the *In Our Time* collection published in 1924 to his post-World War II novel, *Across the River and Into the Trees*. In addition to World War I action, Hemingway later covered the Greek-Turkish War in 1920, while the Spanish Civil War in 1937 provided material for his *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

Following World War I, Hemingway returned to northern Michigan to read, write, and fish, and then to work for the *Toronto Star* in Canada. He lived briefly in Chicago, where he came to know Sherwood Anderson. In 1921 he married Hadley Richardson and they moved to Paris, where he was foreign correspondent for the *Toronto Star*. His newsbeat was all of Europe, and while still in his twenties, Hemingway had interviewed Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and Mussolini. The years 1921-26 in Paris, when Hemingway was first developing his writing style and when his first son John was born, are recorded in *A Moveable Feast* (1964).

Sherwood Anderson had given Hemingway a letter of introduction to Gertrude Stein, who was living in Paris, and that proved to be his entrance into the world of working authors and artists who

visited her home. It was she who mentioned a garage keeper's comment to Hemingway, "You are all a lost generation." That casual remark became famous when Hemingway used it as an epigraph to his first major novel, *The Sun Also Rises*.

"Lost generation" came to signify the postwar generation and the literary movement produced by the young writers. These writers of the twenties were thought to reflect that generation's belief that their lives and hopes had been shattered by the war. They had been led down a glory trail to death not for noble, patriotic ideals, but for the greedy, materialistic gain of power groups. The high-minded sentiments of their elders were not to be trusted. Only reality was truth and that was harsh. Life was futile — nothing.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, Sherwood Anderson, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein are among those usually credited with influencing Hemingway's early writing. Most of that early work was lost when a suitcase containing the first draft of his first novel and eighteen of his stories representing most of four years work was stolen from his wife Hadley on a train to Lausanne, Switzerland. Later, "My Old Man," one of two short stories that Hemingway had left was selected for Edward O'Brien's volume of *Best Short Stories of 1923*, which was dedicated to Hemingway.

Early Hemingway stories had appeared in German and French publications before the *Atlantic Monthly* magazine published "Fifty Grand," the short story that introduced his startling concept of crisp, concise dialog to the United States. In 1923, *Three Stories and Ten Poems* was published, followed in 1924 by the Paris edition of *in our time*. (The lack of capital letters was the current vogue to call attention to newness.) In 1925 *In Our Time* was published in the United States by Boni and Liveright, Sherwood Anderson's publishers, who rejected Hemingway's next book, *The Torrents of Spring*, a satire of Anderson's *Dark Laughter*. Scribner's published the rejected manuscript and that same year issued Hemingway's first successful novel, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926).

The Hemingways were divorced in 1927, the same year the he married *Vogue* writer Pauline Pfeiffer. In 1928 the Hemingways

moved to Key West, Florida, where Patrick was born in 1929 and Gregory in 1932. The shocking event of 1928 for Hemingway was the suicide of his father, who had been ill with hypertension and diabetes. It wasn't until 1940 that the experience was reflected in his writing through the thoughts of Robert Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and later characters sometimes expressed thoughts on suicide.

Between wars and books Hemingway traveled and pursued hunting and other sports. Bullfighting claimed his attention and resulted in *Death in the Afternoon*. His 1934 African safari yielded material for *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* and *Green Hills of Africa*.

For Whom the Bell Tolls, published in 1940, grew out of Hemingway's personal interest in the Spanish Civil War of the thirties. While still a foreign correspondent in Paris, Hemingway had watched the Spanish political situation developing under the reign of Alfonso XIII. He had visited Spain again during the summer of 1931 after the overthrow of the monarchy. He predicted the civil war would begin in 1935 and when it erupted in 1936, Hemingway began writing and making speeches to raise funds for the Loyalist cause. Later in 1937, he went to Spain to cover the war for the North American Newspaper Alliance. In reality, the Spanish Civil War was the first battleground for World War II, testing the forces of Nazism, Communism, and Fascism against the established republican, or royal, form of government. Many young men from the United States and other countries joined the Spanish Loyalist forces in defense of democratic ideals in a war that was won by the dictator, Francisco Franco.

In 1940, Hemingway and Pauline were divorced. He married writer Martha Gelhorn and they toured China before establishing in Cuba. When World War II began Hemingway volunteered his fishing boat, *Pilar*, and served with the U.S. Navy as a submarine spotter in the Caribbean. In 1944, he was a forty-five-year-old war correspondent barnstorming through Europe with the Allied invasion troops — and sometimes ahead of them.

Following his divorce in 1944, Hemingway married Mary Welsh, a *Time* magazine correspondent. They lived in Venice after

the war before returning to *Finca Vigia* (Lookout Farm) near Havana, Cuba. In 1950, *Across the River and Into the Trees* appeared and was not a critical success. One of the reported comments was, "Papa is finished." His 1952 work, *The Old Man and the Sea* received the 1953 Pulitzer Prize.

☐ In January of 1954 Hemingway was off for another African hunt and was reported dead after two airplane crashes in two days. He survived severe internal and spinal injuries and a concussion that impaired his eyesight for a period. He survived to read the numerous newspaper obituary notices and noted with great pleasure that they were favorable. That same year Hemingway received the Swedish Academy's Nobel Prize for Literature, "for his powerful style-forming mastery of the art of modern narration, as most recently evinced in *The Old Man and the Sea*."

Suddenly he was sixty and there was his birthday photograph in a national magazine. White-bearded and still full of ginger, Hemingway was booting an empty beer can high in the air along a road near his Ketchum, Idaho, home.

During 1961, Hemingway, plagued by high blood pressure and mental depression, received shock treatments during two long confinements at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. He died July 2, 1961, at his home in Ketchum, Idaho, as the result of self-inflicted gunshot wounds and was buried in Ketchum.

In a manner, there were two Hemingways. One was the flamboyant adventurer—the lively legend in the spotlight. The other Hemingway was the skillful, sensitive author who patiently wrote, rewrote, and edited his work. *A*Farewell to Arms* (1929) required eight months for writing the first draft and another five months for rewriting, according to Hemingway, who claimed to have rewritten the last page thirty-nine times. That writing discipline begun in the twenties persisted throughout his literary career. In discussing *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), Hemingway is said to have read through the manuscript some two hundred times before releasing it. Hemingway, the colorful legend, was also the author who said, "What many another writer would be content to leave in massive proportions, I polish into a tiny gem."

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

There is nothing really complicated about the plot of *A Farewell to Arms*. It is the story of two people who meet in an unlikely place and fall in love. There is a war going on, however, and this makes a slight difference.

In the classic formula, the plot goes: boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back. Clinch and a life happy ever after. Hemingway alters the last chapter, so to speak.

As in almost every great novel, there are elements of the autobiographical in this one. Hemingway was a Red Cross ambulance driver on the Italian front in World War I, and he was severely wounded in the legs by mortar fragments and heavy machine gun fire. But all this was after the disastrous retreat from Caporetto, and we can only presume that he writes about this from what he heard. Also, the love story is obviously an invention of the novelist's mind. But he knows his locale, and his people, and in the credo of the writer who should write only about what he knows, he is true to his craft.

This is not a pretty story. In some of the descriptions of war, Hemingway is every bit a match for some of the horror-boys who wrote about World War II. With one difference: he writes far better. And at the same time it is a shining and beautiful story of the love of two people who need each other in a period of upheaval.

"Ernest Hemingway was already regarded [before the publication of *A Farewell to Arms* in 1929], by a limited literary public, as a writer of extraordinary freshness and power, as one of the makers, indeed, of a new American fiction," says Robert Penn Warren. "*A Farewell to Arms* more than justified the early enthusiasm of the connoisseurs for Hemingway and extended this reputation from them to the public at large. Its great importance was at once acknowledged, and its great importance has survived through the changing fashions and interests of twenty years."

That was written in 1949 as an introduction to yet another edition of this novel. It is still true today. Other writers of note wrote

about World War I, but *A Farewell to Arms* remains to this day the most remembered book in English about that epoch.

This was the novel that made Ernest Hemingway. He was becoming recognized as an American writer of some merit, and other writers, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sherwood Anderson, who were already famous, went to bat for him so that Charles Scribner's Sons and more particularly the great editor, Maxwell Perkins, took an interest in his work. *A Farewell to Arms* was Hemingway's first commercial success, selling over 80,000 copies in the first four months.

This is one of the great war and love stories of all time. Some critics call it the greatest book to have been written about World War I, although it is not only a war novel. *Farewell* is a great deal more than a war story; it is a great love story, a modern *Romeo and Juliet* in its intensity and tragedy. The love story could not have taken place without the background of war, however, and therein lies its tragedy and its beauty.

In judging any of the characters in this book, any of the motivations, the war must be borne in mind. Catherine, for example, is a "little crazy" when she first meets Henry, because her fiancé has been killed on the Somme. Henry is not normal, either, by peacetime standards. Nor is Rinaldi, nor the priest, nor Miss Ferguson, nor the barman at the hotel in Stresa. Only occasionally, someone comes on the scene who does not seem to be touched by the war. The old Count Greffi might be one, but he is so old that the inference might be that he is not living in this age at all.

✓ All of Hemingway's novels are tragedies. Some critics have accused him of being obsessed by death, and others say that he is simply depicting life as it is. In any case, do not read Hemingway expecting a happy ending. There is a doom that hangs over this novel from the very first chapter, and Hemingway's mastery is in not dragging it down to stark tragedy, but in maintaining a sort of roller-coaster, happy-sad, life-death tempo that brings us to the last chapter uplifted, only to be cast down into the depths of sadness.

The critic, Carlos Baker, says of this novel:

Neither in *Romeo and Juliet* nor in *A Farewell to Arms* is the catastrophe a direct and logical result of the immoral social situation. Catherine's bodily structure, which precludes a normal delivery for her baby, is an unfortunate biological accident. The death of Shakespeare's lovers is also precipitated by an accident—the detention of the message-bearing friar. The student of esthetics, recognizing another kind of logic in art than that of mathematical cause-and-effect, may however conclude that Catherine's death, like that of Juliet, shows a kind of artistic inevitability. Except by a large indirection, the war does not kill Catherine any more than the Veronese feud kills Juliet. But in the emotional experience of the novel, Catherine's dying is directly associated and interwoven with the whole tragic pattern of fatigue and suffering, loneliness, defeat and doom, of which the war is itself the broad social manifestation. And one might make a similar argument about *Romeo and Juliet*.

Later, Hemingway—who never did turn out a great deal of material in comparison to many other writers—in such books as *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea*, perfected his style, but in many ways *A Farewell to Arms* might be considered his greatest work. It was written by a young man, and while it is not technically perfect, it has life and verve. Without a doubt, it will remain a great book of war and love.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

There are a good many characters in this war novel, but it is in essence the story of Frederick Henry and Catherine Barkley, and no one else plays much of a part in the story. All the others are supernumeraries, or extras, or at the most, bit actors. They play their parts, but in the end there are only two people that count: Frederick Henry and Catherine. Those who have any bearing on the story are listed below in order of appearance.

Frederick Henry

An American second lieutenant in the Italian army.

The Priest 祭司
The chaplain in Henry's outfit.

Rinaldi
An Italian surgeon, a friend to Frederick.

Catherine Barkley
An English volunteer nurse.

Helen Ferguson
A friend of Catherine.

Passini, Manera, Gavuzzi, Gordini
Henry's ambulance drivers.

Mrs. Walker
An American nurse.

Miss Gage
Another American nurse and friend to Henry and Catherine.

Miss Van Campen
Superintendent of nurses.

Dr. Valentini
An Italian surgeon.

Meyers
A mysterious old American.

Ettore Moretti
An Italian from San Francisco.

Ralph Simmons
An American studying singing in Italy.

Bonello, Piani, Aymo
Ambulance drivers.

Count Greffi

Patriarch who plays billiards with Henry in Stresa.

COMMENTARY

BOOK ONE

The locale and the background of the novel is not indicated, but it is apparently in the Julian Alps in what is now the frontier area between Italy and Yugoslavia. Italy, as an ally of Britain and France and Imperial Russia, was engaging the forces of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The front ran from the Swiss border in the Otztaler Alps across the Austrian border in the Carnic Alps to the Julian Alps along the Yugoslav frontier, and down into the plains around Trieste. It was Italy's job to keep the Austro-Hungarian forces occupied so that they could not actively help Germany on the Western and Eastern fronts. This Italy succeeded in doing, but the collapse of Russia and sufferings at home brought on revolutionary riots in Turin in 1917 and affected the morale of the troops at the front. This is the period of which Hemingway writes. In the end the Italians were victorious, but at a fearful cost. They had lost 600,000 soldiers and had over one million wounded, of whom some 220,000 were permanently maimed.

The locale and the background of the novel will help to keep in mind that the fighting went on in the mountains and also in the plains and finally that Italy has a common border with Switzerland. Switzerland was neutral in World War I, just as she has been neutral in all wars for hundreds of years. This has a bearing on the story.

The description of the troops passing sets the mood for a book that does not glamorize war. The troops marching in the mud, the officers going by in their cars splashing mud, and the almost daily inspections by the King all add up to a campaign that is going "very badly," as Hemingway tells us. The chapter ends on the throw-away line (understatement) that when winter came there was an epidemic of cholera in the Army, but "only seven thousand died." All of this sets the scene for the tragic happenings to come.

So far, we do not know who is telling the story. The only indication that it is being told in the first person is the use of "we" on several occasions. Later, we will learn that the narrator is Frederick Henry, a second lieutenant in the Italian Army, an American volunteer in the Ambulance Corps, but there is no indication of this yet.

Thus, the beginning does little more than set the scene, but it is a fine example of the tight, disciplined Hemingway style. Not a word is wasted, and when we have read the 500 or so words, we have been given a description of a war front that should be vivid to the reader.

Hemingway reaches what we might call second gear in Chapter 2. He is setting the physical scene more firmly, and introducing the theme of the book which may be stated as love against hate, good against evil. We have not gotten into the mainstream of the story by any means yet, but the cast of characters is being introduced, and, more importantly, the mood is being set.

Gorizia is a town behind the lines that once belonged to the Austrians. It is, we gather, the headquarters of Frederick Henry's detachment, although we are still not told its duties. The existence of two brothels, one for officers and one for the enlisted men, should not surprise Americans: that was common practice in most armies except the American.

① The ^{↑ 大 意 也} scene in the mess hall appears to be no more than the idle soldiers' ^{↑ 闲 话} chaffing of the young priest; however, it carries a significant symbolic importance for the entire novel. One important thing to note is that Frederick Henry does not in any way enter into the baiting of the priest. It is the common, the ordinary, the average officer who delights in ridiculing the priest. Even though the values that the priest advocates are values which are totally alien or foreign to Frederick Henry, yet Frederick does recognize that the priest exists by a definite system of values. What Frederick Henry is searching for throughout the novel is some consistent system of values to which he can adhere; consequently he will respect the values of the priest. He will accept him as a type of code hero even though his code varies significantly from that of the Hemingway man.

The baiting functions in another way also. Frederick Henry is attempting to decide where to go on his leave. We will later discover that he goes to the houses of prostitution, where he remains drunk for most of his leave time. At this point in Frederick Henry's life, drink and sex are both escape symbols. He is trying to obliterate the meaninglessness of this world of war and is trying to escape by submerging himself in a series of sensual experiences. He blinds himself to any true system of values by devoting himself to fulfillment of the appetites. Consequently he refuses to go to what the priest calls the "clear, cold, dry country." When Henry returns from his leave he will later tell the priest that he regretted not going to this clear, cold, dry country which in the meantime will have taken on the symbolic significance of being a place of values, of being a place where a man can find his inner self.

And we come to the additional symbolism that critics such as Carlos Baker (*Hemingway, The Writer as Artist*, Princeton University Press, 1952) and Robert Penn Warren dwell on at some length. This is what Baker calls the Mountain and the Plain. The priest from the mountain country of Abruzzi is the symbol of the mountain—the good—while the captain from the lowlands is the symbol of the plain—the bad. This will come out again and again later, but it is important to keep it in mind here for an understanding of how Hemingway has planned the story.

With the introduction of Lieutenant Rinaldi in Chapter 3, we meet an exuberant Italian, emotional and fiery. For the first time the cast of characters is being introduced. Rinaldi speaks of the beautiful English girls and of a certain Miss Barkley. Rinaldi is, of course, always in love with someone, and Henry's casual acceptance of the statement is indicative of how much stock he puts in Rinaldi's romantic attachments. But the introduction of the character has been made and it will be significant later. This is a playwright's device, to introduce a character before actually bringing the person onstage, and Hemingway is performing the function of playwright at this point.

The symbolism of mountain and plain is again displayed in the talk Henry has with the priest. Note how he says he had been to no