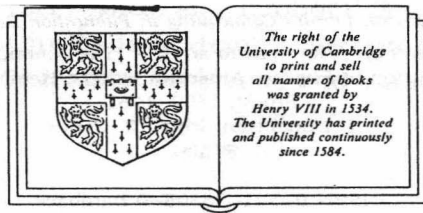


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*New Essays on
A Farewell to Arms*

*Edited by
Scott Donaldson*



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Series Editor's Preface

In literary criticism the last twenty-five years have been particularly fruitful. Since the rise of the New Criticism in the 1950s, which focused attention of critics and readers upon the text itself – apart from history, biography, and society – there has emerged a wide variety of critical methods which have brought to literary works a rich diversity of perspectives: social, historical, political, psychological, economic, ideological, and philosophical. While attention to the text itself, as taught by the New Critics, remains at the core of contemporary interpretation, the widely shared assumption that works of art generate many different kinds of interpretation has opened up possibilities for new readings and new meanings.

Before this critical revolution, many American novels had come to be taken for granted by earlier generations of readers as having an established set of recognized interpretations. There was a sense among many students that the canon was established and that the larger thematic and interpretative issues had been decided. The task of the new reader was to examine the ways in which elements such as structure, style, and imagery contributed to each novel's acknowledged purpose. But recent criticism has brought these old assumptions into question and has thereby generated a wide variety of original, and often quite surprising, interpretations of the classics, as well as of rediscovered novels such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, which has only recently entered the canon of works that scholars and critics study and that teachers assign their students.

The aim of The American Novel Series is to provide students of American literature and culture with introductory critical guides to

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Introduction

SCOTT DONALDSON

A *Farewell to Arms* made Hemingway a famous author. Published just as he passed his thirtieth birthday, it brought him the kind of public and critical acclaim he had been seeking since he had decided, in the aftermath of his wounding in 1918, to become a writer. During the ten-year interim, he had worked effectively as a foreign correspondent and then abandoned that career to devote all his energy to fashioning the understated and pared-away prose style that was his most important legacy to twentieth-century literature. At first it was difficult to place this new kind of writing. His stories were interesting, editors acknowledged, but they read like sketches or *contes*, not ordinary fiction. The breakthrough occurred at mid-decade, when the stories and novels came with a rush. Between 1923 and 1927 Hemingway published two slim volumes from small presses in Paris and four hardcover books in the United States. The best known of these was *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), a novel that caused something of a sensation. On the surface, *Sun* appeared to celebrate an expatriate world of drinking and sex. He had written "one of the filthiest books of the year," his mother wrote him, and many agreed with her. This, of course, was a drastic misreading of a novel that Hemingway insisted was a "very moral book." He did not mind confounding the expectations of genteel readers, but he did want to be taken seriously. His next novel, he realized, should address a major theme, and two of the great themes were love and war.

Though in 1924 he started and soon gave up on an autobiographical novel about his war experiences, tentatively entitled "Along with Youth," the war was very much in the background of many of his best stories. Late in 1926 and early in 1927 he wrote

two stories closely based on his traumatic wounding in July 1918. "Now I Lay Me" described the sleeplessness he suffered after being blown up at night on the Austrian front. "In Another Country," with its opening sentence that F. Scott Fitzgerald so admired – "In the fall the war was always there, but we did not go to it any more" – recalled the therapy he had undergone for his leg at Milan's Ospedale Maggiore. Both stories raised the possibility that marriage might somehow relieve the anguish of the wounded soldier, and both rejected that possibility. He was not yet ready to integrate the themes of love and war, and in a short story there wasn't enough space to accomplish such a complicated task.

The potentialities of such a novel must have been spinning around in his head – as Paul Smith demonstrates in his essay "The Trying-out of *A Farewell to Arms* – but it was not until March 1928 that he started a story that kept growing and eventually became *Farewell*. The novel was written and revised and proofed during the next fifteen months, in many different parts of the United States and Europe. Hemingway started it in Paris in March, continued at Key West, Florida, in April and early May, kept making progress during a visit to his wife Pauline's parents in Piggott, Arkansas, and during her delivery of their son Patrick in Kansas City, Missouri, in the heat of June and July, and completed his manuscript late in August after producing as many as seventeen pages a day in three separate locations around Sheridan, Wyoming. He was back in Key West to work on revisions in November, and his editor Max Perkins came down to collect the script and spend a week fishing late in January. Shortly thereafter Perkins wired an offer of \$16,000 to serialize the novel in *Scribner's Magazine*, and Hemingway read proofs on the six-part serial version both in Key West and in France. He was still struggling with the ending of the book, however, and did not complete the final version until June 24, 1929, in Paris. The following month he was correcting book galleys in Spain, and finally, on September 27, Scribners brought out *A Farewell to Arms* at \$2.50. It was an immediate success.¹

Geography really didn't matter to a writer practicing his craft, Hemingway believed, and the composition of *Farewell* certainly illustrated the point. He wrote it in a series of strange rooms, living

out of suitcases. And he wrote it despite a series of daunting personal and professional complications. All that traveling about in 1928–9 reflected the still-unsettled state of his marriage to Pauline Pfeiffer, the woman for whom he had divorced his first wife, Hadley Richardson. Married in May 1927, he and the new Mrs. Hemingway decided to sink roots in the United States, especially because they were soon to become parents. Before they settled on Key West as the family home, however, the newlyweds were in a state of almost frantic movement. And Pauline's delivery, late in June, could hardly have been more difficult. Her life was manifestly in danger as she suffered through eighteen hours of labor and a cesarean section to give birth to their son. That crisis, resolved more painfully, Hemingway wrote into the final pages of *A Farewell to Arms*.

Early December produced another family misfortune, this time fatal. Depressed, in poor health, and worried about his financial affairs, Ernest's father shot himself in his bedroom at Oak Park, Illinois. "I was very fond of him and feel like hell about it," Hemingway wrote Max Perkins. But as eldest son, he also felt an obligation to see to the welfare of his mother and the two children still at home. Dr. C. E. Hemingway had left "damned little money" for their support, and the thing for Ernest to do, he wrote Perkins, was to keep on with *Farewell* so that he could help them out.²

The professional difficulties that lay ahead were primarily concerned with the book's acceptability. In at least five different ways, *Farewell* violated conventional standards and aroused the objection of one group or another. It used the vulgar language of the troops. It depicted an illicit love affair in basically sympathetic terms. It described Catherine's deathbed anguish in excruciating detail. It did not sufficiently condemn Frederic's desertion from the Italian army. It presented a disturbingly vivid account of the Italian army's collapse in 1917.

Max Perkins was particularly concerned about the language of the novel, just as he had been in the case of *Sun*. In re-creating the background of men at war, Hemingway reproduced some of their barracks talk. Not to do so, he felt, would present a false view of an essentially brutal life. Soldiers at the front swore as naturally and consistently as they patronized whorehouses, and so it should be

in *Farewell*. Perkins, however, worried about the probable outrage of readers unaccustomed to seeing such words in print. This was especially true in regard to the serialization of the book in *Scribner's Magazine*. The magazine had a family readership, he explained to Ernest, and certain words and even passages would have to be omitted in the serial. Happy with his \$16,000 magazine sale, the largest yet paid by *Scribner's*, Hemingway consented. Words and phrases could be cut, but blank spaces or ellipses should be inserted to indicate the cuts. Emasculation was "a small operation," but not one to be undertaken lightly.

When Robert Bridges, editor of the magazine, sent Hemingway the proofs of the first installment on February 19, he called attention to the use of dashes in place of words that might be thought inappropriate in the high school classrooms that used *Scribner's* for supplementary reading. It would be different with the book, he said. They were using the novel to lead off their May issue and planned to run it in six installments. At that stage, Hemingway began to worry about the Italian response, and he composed a disclaimer to accompany the June issue. Although *Farewell* was written in the first person, he pointed out, it was "not autobiographical" and was "no more intended as a criticism of Italy or Italians" than Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. When the proofs of the second installment reached him, he discovered that Bridges had made two substantial cuts — one of six lines in the manuscript, the other of ten lines — without consulting him. That was not something he had agreed to, and he exploded in an angry letter to Perkins that he would rather return the money than permit arbitrary eliminations. Half of his writing consisted in elimination, and if someone else was also going to be cutting, then let that person sign the book too. That was on March 11, and eleven days later, after assurance from Perkins that he anticipated no further changes (other than blanks for coarse language), Hemingway calmed down. Let the cuts stand, he wrote his editor.³

When the book galleys arrived in June, however, Hemingway once more reacted with indignation. The very words that Perkins wanted to delete — "balls," "shit," "fuck," "cocksucker," for example — he could find in Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the war novel that had become a best-seller in Ger-

many and England and was about to be published in the United States. For him to leave out the way soldiers actually talked would weaken *Farewell*. But, he added, if using the words meant that the book would be suppressed, he would go along with the omissions.⁴ Before the month was out, suppression emerged as a very real possibility.

On June 20, Michael H. Crowley, Boston's police chief, barred the June issue of *Scribner's Magazine* from the bookstands of the city because part of the installment of *Farewell* was deemed salacious. What bothered the Boston censors, and what bothered most of the readers who canceled their subscriptions to the magazine, was not the language of the book so much as the subject matter, particularly the love affair between the unmarried protagonists. "What modernists call realism," an outraged gentleman from Maine wrote, "reminds me of an artist picking out for a still life picture a half empty milk bottle with milk souring and the flies crawling over it, some stale and rotting vegetables, and moldy bread." Some kitchens looked like that, he realized, but they did not interest him as "a permanent exhibit" on his wall.⁵ Such a reaction seems quaint sixty years later, and being banned in Boston has become something of a joke in the interim, but Scribners took the news very seriously at the time.

In a carefully worded statement, the publishers called the Boston police chief's action "an improper use of censorship." It was wrong to base objections on certain passages without taking into consideration "the effect and purpose of the story as a whole." In its overall effect, *Farewell* was "distinctly moral. It is the story of a fine and faithful love, born, it is true, of physical desire." If good can come from evil, then the writer must be allowed to describe the conditions from which the good evolves. If white is to be contrasted with black, then a picture cannot be all white. But, the statement concluded, Hemingway's novel was neither a moral tract nor — as some seemed to think it — an example of antiwar propaganda. It was a story by "one of the finest and most highly regarded of the modern writers," and it would continue to run in *Scribner's Magazine* for the next four issues. Sales of all those issues were forbidden in Boston.⁶

Book banning in Boston was already an old story in 1929, but

prohibiting the sale of a magazine in which a book was appearing was a new development, and the censorship engendered nationwide publicity. That was not all bad, of course. "Many readers had doubtless missed Mr. Hemingway's powerful story," the *New York Herald Tribune* commented, "and they will be grateful to the [Boston police] chief for calling their attention to it." The magazine sales were not much affected, with increased circulation outside Massachusetts making up for what was lost there. The book itself stood to profit from the notoriety, but Perkins took little pleasure in that circumstance. "I hate the publicity, greatly helpful as it may turn out to be," he wrote Hemingway on June 27. It cast a "deeply significant and beautiful" book in an unhealthy and prejudicial light. And it increased the likelihood that the book might be suppressed. There were three words (Perkins could not bring himself to set them down on paper) that might prompt legal action. One of these was so objectionable that it "might turn a judge right around against us, and to the post office, it and the others, I think, would warrant (technically) action." Besides, he pointed out, it would be a dirty shame to have Hemingway associated with the purveyors of smut. On July 12, Perkins reiterated his fears. They had decided against taking the Boston ban to court, because that seemed unlikely to accomplish anything of importance. Besides, "there is still . . . considerable anxiety for fear of the federal authorities being stirred up. They seem to take curious activity of late, and if the post office should object, we would be in Dutch."⁷

With the threat of legal and governmental suppression so firmly established, Hemingway acceded to Perkins's deletion of gutter language (most of it uttered during the chaos of the retreat from Caporetto). "I understand . . . about the words you cannot print – if you cannot print them – and I never expected you could print the one word (C-S) that you cannot and that lets me out." Yet where such sanctions were not involved, he stuck to his guns. On August 16, Perkins sent *Farewell's* English publisher, Jonathan Cape, two sets of galleys, one with the offending words blanked out, the other with the words spelled out "if you feel they can be, and according to the author's wish."⁸

Perkins also moved to protect Hemingway's reputation through the assistance of Owen Wister, author of *The Virginian*, friend and biographer of Theodore Roosevelt, and highly respected literary elder statesman. Wister had come to Hemingway's defense when *Sun* had been under attack, and now he did so again, despite certain reservations about *Farewell*. Wister read the new novel well in advance of publication and wrote Perkins on April 30 that he thought the book "many jumps of seven league boots ahead of anything he has done so far." But he found it "too outspoken in its medical details. . . . They are so terrible and so powerful that I personally shrank from them as I read." It would be better, he thought, if Hemingway could leave out the ether and communicate Catherine's agony by suggestion. "They've got to give me something," she might say, and that would be enough to make the point. But Wister was not adamant on this subject, and when he and Hemingway dined together in Paris in the wake of the Boston ban, they got along famously. Some weeks later Wister did write to Hemingway with his suggestions for revision, which Hemingway acknowledged without adopting. "Your advice is always good and I will take all I can of it," he replied. He didn't take much, and he was decidedly annoyed when, even after publication, Wister marked up a copy of the book and sent it to Hemingway as instruction on "what to put in as important and what to leave out as immaterial."

Immediately after the Boston ban, however, Wister rallied to Hemingway's cause with a public expression of praise. *Farewell* was far better than his earlier work, Wister asserted. "He had got rid of those jolty Western Union ten word sentences . . . and also of that monotony which came of dealing too much in human garbage. This book is full of beauty and variety, and nobody in it is garbage." In addition, he endeavored to make an asset of the book's frankness by comparing it to the work of Defoe. Hemingway, like Defoe, was "lucky to be writing in an age that will not stop its ears at the unmuted resonance of a masculine voice."⁹

As Perkins had anticipated, the publicity about *Farewell* generated a good deal of interest, and Scribners ran off a first printing of 31,050 copies for the September 27 publication of the book. (By

way of contrast, the firm had issued *Sun* in a first printing of 6,000, with two additional printings of 2,000 each within the first few months. Eventually, of course, both novels sold millions of copies.) "FIRST REVIEW SPLENDID STOP PROSPECTS BRIGHT," Perkins wired Hemingway on September 28, and then "ALREADY GETTING REORDERS STOP VERY FINE PRESS" on October 3. By that time, they had ordered a second printing of 10,000 copies, and several other printings followed during the fall. Early in January, sales passed 70,000 copies, and *Farewell* occupied a strong position on the best-seller lists in competition with, among others, Remarque's *All Quiet*.¹⁰

Save for a few adamant defenders of literary respectability, *Farewell* took the reviewers by storm. Without understanding the novel in any deep or lasting sense, they nonetheless recognized that it was a remarkable performance. "I have finished *A Farewell to Arms* and am still a little breathless, as people are after a major event in their lives," James Aswell commented in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. John Dos Passos, writing in *The New Masses*, called the book "a first-rate piece of craftsmanship by a man who knows his job," and lest that sound like faint praise, he went on to mention half a dozen brilliant passages that "match up as narrative prose with anything that's been written since there was any English language." Clifton Fadiman touted the novel for the Pulitzer Prize (it did not win). In England, J. B. Priestley suggested that before long readers might be able to boast of owning a first edition of *A Farewell to Arms*, and Arnold Bennett called it "strange and original," yet "superb."¹¹

Several reviewers detected the influence of Sherwood Anderson and, especially, Gertrude Stein in Hemingway's prose. In its reliance on simple speech and repetition, *Farewell* seemed to be following the lead of Stein's *Three Lives*, with the difference – as Fanny Butcher pointed out in the *Chicago Tribune* – that in the case of Hemingway one could be "perfectly clear" about what he was saying. "Ernest Hemingway," she wrote, "is the direct blossoming of Gertrude Stein's art." Then there was the question of Hemingway's influence on others. As Malcolm Cowley observed, "he is imitated by writers much older than himself – a rare phenomenon

— and one finds traces of his influence almost everywhere." This was particularly noticeable in connection with what Cowley called Hemingway's "subtractive" method. From the novel of previous generations, "he has subtracted the embellishments; he has subtracted all the descriptions, the meditations, the statements of theory and he has reserved only the characters and their behavior — their acts, their sensual perceptions, their words." Henry Hazlitt agreed, but found the influence lamentable. Already one could see signs of a Hemingway school springing up, and the young writers who seemed to idolize him might well find better models to imitate. The "hard, clean, athletic" quality of Hemingway's prose tended to become dull after a time, Hazlitt felt, and was ill-suited for conveying "nuances, shades and subtleties."¹²

Yet that very subtractive style, as Cowley was the first to recognize, bespoke the man and what he had to say about his times. If he was already "mentioned with the respect that one accords to a legendary figure," it was because he "expressed, better than any other writer, the limited viewpoint of his contemporaries, of the generation which was formed by the war and which [was] still incompletely demobilized." "In this book," as Henry Seidel Canby put it, "you get your own times . . . to wonder about and interpret."¹³ This does not, of course, mean that *Farewell* is significant only as a portrait of the generation that went to war and later became bitterly disillusioned. The novel has deeper resonances than that and continues to speak to succeeding generations, but it also evokes the climate of opinion of a particular period. One can say as much of only a few works in the canon of American literature, such as *Huckleberry Finn*, for instance, or *The Waste Land*.

Generally, the early reviews found *Farewell* to be an advance beyond *Sun*. Both books portrayed a world in the throes of despair, but the hopelessness of *Sun* gave way to a kind of affirmation in its successor. As Bernard De Voto put it, the "new book has what its predecessor lacked, passion. It has, too, a kind of sublimity." The subject matter itself contributed to that effect. Fishing, drinking, and bullfighting might not be the stuff of tragedy, but love and death assuredly were. Arnold Bennett had his reservations on this score, however. He thought Hemingway "undecided whether he [was]

writing a description of the war as his hero saw it, or the love-story of his hero." Oddly, that was precisely what Perkins considered the book's "one serious flaw" — that its two great themes of love and war were not sufficiently tied together.¹⁴

For the most part, the early commentators thought the love affair itself honestly rendered, idyllic, moving, "charged with sentiment, beauty, and tragedy," comparable to the story of Romeo and Juliet or of Tristan and Iseult in its poignancy.¹⁵ Yet to some, Frederic and Catherine seemed not fully realized characters, less real than the minor characters, basically uncomplicated, "a pair of silhouettes" with no discernible difference between them.¹⁶ It would be a long while before critics came to recognize the complexity of the novel and its characterization.

From the beginning, though, two sections of the book were singled out for applause. The description of the Italian retreat from Caporetto was, Cowley observed, "perhaps the finest single passage that Hemingway has written." Canby called it "a masterly piece of reporting," evidently under the impression that the author was writing out of personal experience. The mistake was understandable; *Farewell* reads with great authenticity. But Hemingway was still worried about the book's reception in Italy (for good reason, because it was indeed banned in that country) and repeatedly asked Scribners to issue disclaimers to the effect that his story was fiction and was not based on actual characters or military units. Such a disclaimer did run in the front matter to the second printing, but then it disappeared, despite Hemingway's letter of November 30 to Perkins: "You will repeat again that it is fiction, that I lay no claim even to have been in Italy, that I would never attempt to judge or picture Italy or Italians as such, but that I have only taken advantage of the tradition by which writers from the earliest times have laid the scenes of their books in that country."¹⁷

The other passage that reviewers selected for commendation was the novel's ending. They found the final paragraph particularly effective, because its muted tone so well suited the emotional loss that Frederic had suffered.

But after I had got them out and shut the door and turned out the light it wasn't any good. It was like saying good-by to a statue. After

a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain.

You might think Hemingway's "absolutely brutal, cold blooded narrative" ill-suited for emotional effects, Butcher observed, but two different women she knew "were seized with . . . uncontrollable sobs" upon reading this conclusion.¹⁸ To the extent that Hemingway was aware of this praise, he must have been pleased. He sweated over that ending as much as over anything he ever wrote.

Several early commentators addressed the issue of censorship, and almost all of them were in agreement that whatever had happened in regard to the magazine serial, the book should not be suppressed. Harry Hansen of the *New York World*, who had in June entitled a column on the Boston ban "Naughty Ernest," repeated his opinion that some passages could be accounted for only by attributing to the author "a mischievous desire to shock the eminently respectable." Ten years earlier, such a story "could not have been written, much less printed." But times had changed, and now "Hemingway can no more be banned than he can be ignored." *A Farewell to Arms* was "a red rag to the Boston bull," but in book form it was not censored even there.¹⁹ It may be that police chief Crowley and the leaders of the city's Watch and Ward Society were mollified by the death of Catherine, an event that a narrow-minded reader could choose to interpret as a judgment against fornication.

Yet amid the general chorus of acclaim, a few dissonant voices could be heard bemoaning the novel's explicit language and unconventional love affair. Among the most strident was the writer for the *Newark News* who, in a review that appeared the day after publication, inveighed against "the preoccupation with sex from which Mr. Hemingway cannot, or perhaps will not, free himself." The trouble was that Hemingway was far from alone in that respect; in fact, he and "the other flingers of filth were constantly trying to outdo one another." If the trend were not reversed, current literature might soon sink "into a neurasthenic and phosphorescent decay." Nonetheless, the *News* acknowledged, *Farewell* amounted to an improvement on *Sun*, whose characters

"were for the most part degenerates." In *Farewell* they were "somewhat closer to normal, in that they are merely frankly sensual."²⁰

Looking back over sixty years of literary history, it is difficult to understand the outrage expressed by a few of these first readers. "The obvious purpose of the story," one of them declared, was "to offer a vicarious satisfaction to those who are either too jaded or too timid to get the satisfaction in a normal way through natural experiences." The book should be classified as "venereal fiction." To another, Lieutenant Henry seemed an "utterly immoral" man who "took the woman of his desire as lightly as he deserted from his command in the Italian army." The issue of desertion troubled a number of reviewers, as did the novel's "biological and pathological data." Altogether, Hemingway was far too concerned with realistic detail, and not nearly enough with those "higher purposes" and "larger relations" that, these commentators agreed, constituted the proper province of fiction.²¹

By far the most troublesome of these attacks came from the well-known Chicago novelist and critic Robert Herrick, in a November 1929 article in *Bookman* entitled "What Is Dirt?" On the basis of his reading of the first two installments of *Farewell* in *Scribner's Magazine*, he was confident that Hemingway's novel could only be regarded as "dirt" or, in his misappropriation of Owen Wister's word, as "garbage." Herrick concentrated on two scenes that, he felt, demonstrated his contention. The first of these occurs on the train from the field hospital to Milan, when Frederic and another traveler get drunk on grappa and throw up. Such things certainly happened, Herrick admitted, but that did not give the creative artists license to depict them. Such a creator had a fundamental duty to "endow the activities he chooses to present" with significance, and in his judgment Hemingway had not done so. Therefore the scene was "just unpleasant garbage."

The other offending scene was the reunion of Frederic and Catherine in the Milan hospital, when he persuades her to make love. "This, I maintain, is merely another lustful indulgence, like so many that occur between men and women and have since the beginning of time and will persist to its end. It has no significance, no more than what goes on in a brothel, hardly more than the